



Prabuddha Bharata

or

Awakened India

VOL 93 MARCH 1988



Editorial Office

P.O. Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
Dt. Pithoragarh 262 524, U.P.

Publication Office

5 Dehi Entally Road
Calcutta 700 014
Phone: 29-0898



Rates of Subscription (inclusive of postage)

	Annual	Life (30 years)
India, Nepal & Bangladesh	Rs. 20	Rs. 300
U.S.A. & Canada		
Surface Mail	\$ 14	\$ 200
Air Mail	\$ 28	\$ 450
Other Countries		
Surface Mail	£ 6	£ 60
Air Mail	£ 10	£ 150

Prabuddha Bharata

Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE
RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

MARCH 1988

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No. 3

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the Goal is reached.

VISIONS OF DIVINITY

Swami Vivekananda

And then he came ; his very entrance and his silence as he stood and waited to begin were like some great hymn. A whole worship in themselves.

At last he spoke—his face broke into fun, and he asked what was to be his subject. Someone suggested the Vedanta philosophy and he began.

Oneness—the Unity of all.... And so the final essence of things is this Unity. What we see as many—as gold, love, sorrow, the world—is really God.... We see many, yet there is but One Existence.... These names differ only in the degrees of their expression. The matter of today is the spirit of the future. The worm of today—the God of tomorrow. These distinctions which we so love are all parts of one Infinite fact and that one Infinite fact is the attainment of Freedom....

“All our struggle is for Freedom—we seek neither misery nor happiness but Freedom.... Man’s burning unquenchable thirst—never satisfied—asking always for more and more.... At bottom this desire is the sign of man’s infinitude. For infinite man can only be satisfied when his desire is infinite and its fulfilment infinite also....”

And so the splendid sentences rolled on and on, and we, lifted into the Eternities, thought of our common selves as of babies stretching out their hands for the moon or the sun—thinking them as baby’s toys. The wonderful voice went on:

“Who can help the Infinite.... Even the hand that comes to you through the darkness will have to be your own.”

And then with that lingering, heart-piercing pathos, that no pen can even suggest, “We—infinite dreamers, dreaming finite dreams.”

Ah, they are mistaken who say that a voice is nothing—that ideas are all. For this in its rise and fall was the only possible music to the poetry of the words—making the whole hour a pause, retreat, in the market place of life—as well as a song of praise in some dim cathedral aisle.

At last—the whole dying down and away in the thought—“I could not see *you* or speak to you for a moment—I who stand here seeing and talking—if this Infinite Unity were broken for a moment—if one little atom could be crushed and moved out of its place... Hari Om Tat Sat!”

—*Sister Nivedita*

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL is written on the need of spiritual values in today's education, as revealed in the two reports on national education published by the government of India in 1985 and 1986.

Swami VIVEKANANDA'S VISION OF COMPLETE MAN AND TODAY'S POLITICAL THOUGHTS (Part 1) by Swami Someswarananda of the Ramakrishna Mission, Bombay, is a comparative study of the Vedantic view of the true individuality and freedom of man as against the political views of man as a social being.

TRAILANGA SWAMI: A LEGEND IN HIS LIFE-TIME is a short life-sketch of the great saint by Prof. Samarendra Krishna Bose,

lecturer in English, Vidyasagar College, Calcutta.

The first part of REFLECTIONS ON THE MEANING OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA FOR WOMEN is an analytical study of the importance of two great women, Chandra Devi and Rani Rasmani on Sri Ramakrishna's life, and his attitude to women in general. The author Ann Myren teaches social sciences at the College of Alameda, Alameda, California.

THE IMMORTAL INDIA is a short two-act play based on Swami Vivekananda's oft-spoken story of the meeting between Alexander and an Indian Yogi. Bodhisattva is the pen-name of the author, who is a monk of the Ramakrishna order.

INDIA NEEDS THE INDIAN-EXPERIENCE IN EDUCATION

(EDITORIAL)

Two reports on Indian education released by the Government of India in 1985 and 1986, have brought some new revelations. The report *National Policy on Education* 1986, says that Indian education today needs 'the Indian Experience in Education'. It virtually concludes with the lines:

There is too much emphasis on Western ideas, and teachers under training do not get exposed adequately to Indian philosophical and psychological concepts of education. Therefore NCERT and UGC should undertake the task of preparing new learning materials which would include textbooks, reference books, anthologies, slides, films etc. and which will reflect the Indian experience in education.¹

1. *National Policy on Education*, 1986 'Programme of Action' (New Delhi: Government of India, Dept. of Education, 1986) p. 195.

A year earlier, in 1985, the Government released a five-yearly review-report on Indian education under the title *Challenge of Education: A Policy Perspective*. The quantitative increase in Education facilities recorded in the report is encouraging. During the last 35 years, educational institutions have increased three-fold, from 2.3 lakhs to 6.9 lakhs; of these 73% are primary schools. Middle schools have increased from 13.4 thousand in 1950-51 to 123.3 thousand in 1982-83. Secondary and Higher Secondary schools have gone up from 7,300 in 1950-51 to 52,279 in 1982-83. Polytechnics have grown by 6.8%. Engineering colleges have increased from 108 in 1975-76 to 200 in 1982-83. Colleges and Universities have grown by six per cent, the present strength being 5,246 colleges and 140 universities.

Overall student-enrolment has grown by 4.5% and literacy has gone up from 16.67% in 1950-51 to 36.23% in 1981. By 1985, 58 lakh population had been covered by adult education, and 68,000 non-formal education centres have been opened for backward classes in remote areas.² In 1950-51, the educational expenditure in India was 114.3 crores. In 1982-83 the budgeted expenditure was 5,185.9 crores. While many countries spend 6 to 8 per cent of the gross national product (GNP) on education, India spends 3 per cent. Education commission (1964-66), however, recommended an expenditure of 6 per cent of GNP.

Indian students have today shown remarkable performance both at home and abroad. Yet, the education report brings a feeling of inadequacy and even of failure in some fronts. It says that today 'thoughtful people...are greatly disturbed by the progressive erosion of values', and 'this erosion of values is pervasive in schools, colleges and universities, amongst teachers as well as students'. This, the report says, 'is seen as a highly dangerous development'³. It further admits that 'few elite schools concern themselves with developing a sense of social obligation amongst their pupils'.

'The goal of the education policy', regrets the 1985 report, 'was nothing less than the creation of an ethos that would produce young men and women of character and ability committed to national service and development. That we have fallen far short of these goals is evident enough'. The report urges that Indian education must fulfil 'two formidable tasks: one of providing quality education to everyone to develop his fullest potential and the other of simultaneously transforming the content and process of education for meeting the emerging needs

of tomorrow', that is, of the 21st-century.⁴ As a solution to these problems the 1986-report makes a colossal plan which was prepared by 23 task forces, each dealing with one front of India's education today. The 1985-report lays emphasis on the inculcation of scientific temper and democratic, moral and spiritual values,⁵ and expects that 'a coherent and an operationally viable value-system would be inculcated through educational processes, based upon rationality and scientific and moral approach to life.'⁶

* * * *

Neither the 1985, nor the 1986 report comes forward to define clearly the concepts like 'an operationally viable value-system' which will at the same time be 'scientific', and 'moral', 'spiritual values', 'quality education', 'fullest potential of the individuals' or even the idea of the 'Indian Experience in Education'. The Indian Experience in Education is based on the one basic truth of Vedanta philosophy. There is infinite power of godhead in every individual, man or woman. Education is only a process of manifesting, through both secular and spiritual knowledge, this Spirit, the infinite knowledge, strength and bliss within each individual, which the Upanishads call Brahman. The science of manifesting the power of this Spirit, this innate divinity within, is what is known as spirituality in Indian tradition. 'Manifest the divinity within you and everything will be harmoniously arranged around it',⁷ Vivekananda used to say.

We must have both secular and spiritual knowledge, says the *Mundaka Upanishad*. Narada, in one of the Upanishads, feels frustrated even after learning all branches of

2. *Challenge of Education—a Policy Perspective* (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, Government of India, 1985) pp. 15-25.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

7. *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981) p. 167.

secular knowledge. The seer Sanatkumara tells him that all he has so far learnt are only words (*nama*). Human life flies to higher scales of evolution on the two wings of matter and spirit. When one is weak or neglected, man can have no progress. When material need is not available, spiritual progress is child's prattle. When spirituality is ignored, material abundance leads nowhere. True happiness and peace is only for him, says the *Katha Upanishad* who has *sraddha* or spiritual faith and meditates on the Infinite within. The Upanishadic seer Uddalaka tells his son Svetaketu, 'Thou art That (Brahman), O Svetaketu'. The Queen Mother Madalasa used to cradle her newborn babies with the words: 'Thou art that spotless One (the Brahman)'.

'Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man', said Vivekananda. It is not an accumulation of information, but is a process of uncovering our innate perfection through acquiring both secular and spiritual knowledge. How to manifest this innate perfection? By *sraddha* or deep faith in one's own self. And this *sraddha* is attained by *brahmacharya* or purity. That is why in the Indian tradition, a student's life is the life of *brahmacharya*. Says Vivekananda, 'We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet. What we want are western science coupled with Vedanta, Brahmacharya as the guiding motto, and also *sraddha*, faith in one's own Self'.⁸ Further, he says, 'By the observance of strict Brahmacharya all learning can be mastered in a very short time; one acquires an unfailing memory of what one hears or knows but once. The chaste brain has tremendous energy and gigantic will power. Controlled desire leads to the

highest results'.⁹ Like a tiny seed this ever-present perfection in man, says Vivekananda, grows into a mighty tree by its own potentiality. The sun, the rain, the soil, and the manures and above all the protective hand of the farmer, only help the seed grow unhindered. Seeing the absence of spiritual values in our education he regretted, 'Education is nowhere'.

Vivekananda dreamt of a nation-wide spread of Vedantic education coupled with western science, through the 'educators of a new order', 'whose characters will be like a blazing fire' and who will stand out before the students 'as the living example of the highest thinking'.¹⁰ One of Vivekananda's western disciples wrote on this vision of their master:

Intellectual attainments were secondary, although he did not underestimate their values. Reading and writing must be the key which would unlock the treasure-house of a great ideal and wider outlook. For it was not merely a school which he had in mind, not an institution, but something much larger, something which cannot be easily labelled or defined, something which would make thousands and tens of thousands of institutions possible in future. In short it was to be an attempt to create the educators of a new order. The education must not be academic, but to meet the requirements of the time, it must be intellectual, rational and spiritual. Unless those who initiated it lighted their own torches at the altar where burns the fire that was brought from above, the work would be of little value. That is why discipleship is necessary. All cannot come to altar, but one torch can light others, until hundreds, thousands are aflame.¹¹

Nearly a century ago Vivekananda dreamt of these educators. Today, a noted British psychiatrist of this century, R. D. Laing writes, 'A child born today in United Kingdom stands ten times chance of being

9. Ibid., p. 43.

10. Ibid., p. 45.

11. Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1961) pp. 222-23.

8. Swami Vivekananda on India and Her Problems (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1985) p. 41.

admitted to a mental hospital than to an university. This can be taken as an indication that we are driving our children mad, more effectively than we are genuinely educating them. Perhaps it is our way of educating them that is driving them mad.' Dr. Fritjof Capra writes on Laing's solution to this problem: 'what we need instead, according to Laing, is an "initiation ceremonial" through which the person will be guided with full social encouragement and sanction into inner space and time, by people who have been there and back again.'¹²

In the old Indian Gurukulas, on the day of the fresher's welcome the Vedantic ideas of the true goal of education were injected by the teachers of character and realization into the minds of the students. These ideas would thenceforward become a part of their thoughts and living during the entire period of education. Again, when they would leave the university campus, the same ideas would be reminded to them through the convocation address. We have one such address in the *Sikshavalli* of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. Today in many institutions, freshers' welcome is a combination of film-songs and barbarous ragging, and convocations are occasions of a pedagogic lecture, followed by formal award of degrees.

Modern educational system is making students 'not educated but trained—though the educators call it education—trained to be good employees of Toyota, Seiko...or the U.S. Steel and Ford Motor company' writes Alvin Toffler, so that they may become "economic animals".¹³ Today's Indian education is producing a kind of 'snobbishness' and 'bowl-in-hand-psychology', writes the 1985-report. Many of the gifted students,

especially in science and technology, go on scholarships to foreign universities. Many of them do not think of coming back. They do not even remember that the Government had to spend nearly Rs. 80,000 for every Engineering graduate and over one lakh for every medical graduate and that this money comes from the sweat and brow of the common masses. Vivekananda did not hesitate to call them 'traitors' who having been educated at the expense of the masses did not pay the least heed to them, and who had no sense of commitment to their country. It is primarily because of the craze for materialism and mere techno-science education among our students. Students are taught to exercise only the rational aspect, the left-half of the brain, the *Yan*. They learn to control computers, and even race in space-ships. But nothing is taught to them about how to develop the right-half, the *Yin*, the mystical, the intuitive aspect of our brain, which is the source of the spiritual knowledge that inspires the heart, the altruistic feeling of oneness with others. Mere cerebration cannot make man feel for others, nor help him to stand stresses or overcome frustrations and emerge successful with the strength within him.

The 1985-report says that both teaching and studying 'have degenerated to "part-time pre-occupation" for getting degrees which have generally lost credibility and value'.¹⁴ When these two become easily available students go for earning right away. No other higher purpose is generally set before them. But many students for whom earning is not the primary problem, begin to suffer from a sense of emptiness and 'purposelessness'. 'Having suffered under perpetual purposelessness', writes Alvin Toffler, 'a young man goes to heroin addiction. The new civilization must also begin providing a framework of order and pur-

12. Dr. Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1982) p.

13. 'Education for Future Shock' (Interview with Alvin Toffler) *PHP* (Singapore: PHP International Pvt. Ltd.) April 1974, p. 5.

14. *Challenge of Education*, op. cit., p. 50.

pose in life'.¹⁵ The university hostels, according to 1986-report, shelter 'antisocials'. It is also known that many of these hostels breed drug addicts who have become the menace of society everywhere. Recently the USA Supreme Court nominee was fired because of his past record of drug addiction which, writes *Time*, is 'decadent, nihilistic and destructive'. It 'attracts the young. It kills their time, robs their attention, and stunts their development and above all it is a gateway to harder drugs... that can destroy people in a very short order'.¹⁶

We remember the verses of the very first Upanishad, the *Isha*, 'Men who have murdered (not realized) the Atman inside are condemned to lead a sunless life of darkness'. *Kena Upanishad* says that without spiritual knowledge, life is a 'great destruction'. Is there a way to reverse the situation? Possibly there is. But it is enormously expensive and time-taking. The recent budget of 325 million dollars which USA intended to spend on anti-drug-addiction education has suddenly become vulnerable, because of the recent Wall-street crash precipitating a huge shortage in American budget.¹⁷ Can India afford such a budget? The need, therefore, is to stem the colossal threat now itself, although it is already sufficiently advanced. And the way is intensive spiritual education along with the secular. In the new framework of education 'the purpose of life' of which Toffler speaks in his celebrated book *The Third Wave*, must be set before our students. That purpose of life, in the words of Vivekananda, is, 'Each soul is potentially divine. The goal of life is to manifest the divine within'.

A hankering for a new spiritual goal in education is evidenced in many other countries as well. The UNESCO report on global

education released in 1982 is named as *Learning to be*. Twenty years before in 1962 the same UNESCO report was named as *Learning to do*, giving utmost stress on vocationalization or applied science and technology. The result is that students evolved as 'tool-making animals' as Benjamin Franklin said of man, or at best 'homopoliticus' of Aristotle. The report *Learning to be* says, on the evidence of contemporary science, that man is 'biologically unfinished and that the goal of education is the making of "the complete man"'. The physical, the intellectual, emotional and ethical integration of the individual into a complete man is the broad definition of the fundamental aim of education', says the report.¹⁸ Further, it advocates man to be 'homoreligiosus' and yet complete! But a man believing in one particular religion only has turned more a fundamentalist than a complete man. The need of today's education is to create not 'homoreligiosus' (religious man) but 'homomysticus' (a mystical or spiritual man), as psychologist Eric Newman calls man. Such a man alone can be ethical in the real sense of the term, for ethics is based on unity, on the spiritual knowledge that the same infinite divinity is in me and my neighbour.

Why is there abnormality among students? California University psychologist James C. Coleman writes, 'Because we have no "ideal model" of human behaviour'.¹⁹ Education is *mimesis* or imitation. Even a child learns by imitating its parents. Political heroes who were installed a few decades ago in totalitarian countries as the 'ideal model' before students, have been dethroned or rejected by the countries themselves. Millions search today for an ideal 'to reintegrate their personalities',²⁰ writes Toffler. Whom

15. Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (London: Pan Books, 1981).

16. *Time* (New York) 23 September 1987, p. 31.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

18. *Learning to Be* (Paris: Unesco, 1982) pp. 154-57.

19. James C. Coleman, *Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life* (Indian Edition) (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala & Co., Pvt. Ltd, 1986) p. 14.

20. *The Third Wave*, p. 395.

shall Indian students 'imitate' today? After thirty-seven years of fruitless wandering for a credible ideal for the Indian Youth, India finally accepted Swami Vivekananda as the ideal for the youth, and declared 12th of January, the birthday of Swami Vivekananda, as the National Youth Day. The first circular about this National ideal before Indian Youth, was, however, released through the department of sports, and not through the department of education of a secular India.

Secularism is not a negation of religious values. It is the acceptance of universal values of all religions. The 1986-report expects religious institutions to operate in such a way so as to 'promote an integration based on appreciation of common national goals and ideals'.²¹ The national ideals of India, in the words of Vivekananda are, *renunciation* (of selfish, parochial, fundamentalist or dogmatic interests) and *service* (to the everpresent divine in man and woman irrespective of caste, creed or religion). Different religions, according to Indian thinking, are only different paths to the same goal. The idea of service to God in man, propounded by Vivekananda as the 'Practical Vedanta', is the only 'operationally viable value-system' capable of integrating this increasingly disintegrating nation. But will these national ideals and goals be accepted by people who believe their God to be the only God, or the only begotten Son of God, and their prophet as the last prophet?

* * * * *

The 1985-report regrets that despite the fact that 'education is the highest budgeted expenditure after Defence' in India, students produced are 'without a sense of self-confidence and pride in their nation'. Many of them know not that 'as Indians they have

great deal in their past and present'.²² The primary responsibility for this sordid state of affairs may squarely be laid on the syllabus which emphasizes more on non-Indian ideas and less on the history and greatness of Indian heritage, and also on the makers of syllabus who have ignored the global relevance of our ancient heritage and national culture.

The combination of 'scientific temper' and 'spiritual values' of which the 1985-report speaks²³ is possible only in the background of Vedanta philosophy. The new holistic approach of modern physics accepts no distinction between matter and mind; it accepts the basic interrelatedness of all matter, the existence of the energy of the entire universe in an atom, and the solidarity of all life. This approach obviously stands incompatible with the ideas of the eternal separation between sinner man and the Perfect God, between believers and non-believers, between matter and mind, which are fundamental to semitic religious thought.

What India, 'the nation of clerks' in British days, needed, Vivekananda foresaw nearly a century ago, was the establishment of institutions for original science-research and development of technology. He wanted 'western science' coupled with Vedanta'. With this end in view he inspired Jamshedji Tata. Tata's letter to Vivekananda in 1898 for establishing the first scientific institution under the guidance of Vivekananda and his brother monks, in an environment of Indian spiritual culture, is the first historical document of science education combined with Vedantic traditions in modern India. Exactly after fifty years when Dr. Homi. J. Bhabha established the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore funded by Tata, he dreamt, like Swamiji, that here science education will be given in such a way that 'every person will

²¹. *National Policy on Education*, 1986 op. cit., p. 116.

²². *Challenge of Education*, op. cit., p. 25 and p. 10.

²³. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

have the opportunity to develop himself spiritually to the fullest stature.²⁴

* * * * *

The 1986-report devotes a whole chapter on 'Education for women's Equality'. Yet what is needed is not just a provision for equal facilities for women, but complete independence for women to decide and develop their future through education which will be free from male-domination. American experiment in women's education, has shown according to a 1987-review, that nearly half of the students from women's colleges have got degrees, while from the co-educational institutions only one third of women have got passed. Students are getting not merely more opportunities but better environment of education in women's colleges.²⁵ Some of the women's colleges both in the south and north of India, are outstanding and highly prestigious. Some of them have been offered the status of autonomous colleges. Vivekananda envisaged that women should educate women. 'Brahmacharinis of education and character should take up the task of teaching.... Through such devout preachers of character there will be real spread of female education in the country,'²⁶ he said.

* * * * *

The UNESCO report on Education, 1982 regrets that 'the malaise of the young' is due mainly to their own elders who are daily flouting the same 'ethical values' the young cherish.²⁷

The 1985-report feels happy that 'whatever merit there is in the present system flows essentially from a sizable number of teachers who have become deeply involved

in the welfare of their pupils, and have, despite the heartaches and the poor rewards available in the system, given their very best to their professional responsibilities'.²⁸

But the picture of another section of the teaching community is bleak. These teachers, says the same report, 'oppose examination reforms chiefly because they will have to work harder', and 'many of the teachers make large sums of money by taking up coaching classes even at the cost of neglecting schedule in the school hours'. As a result 'the general condition of universities and colleges is a matter of great concern to the nation.'²⁹

Why was it not possible to put an end to this state of affairs? The report does not hesitate to state in unequivocal terms that it is 'because of the high level of politicization in educational institutions'. 'Barring a few honourable exceptions, most of the universities and colleges have become', says the report, 'virtual battlefield in which political and other factions, backed by teachers and aided by other staff, often fight pitched battles for power and supremacy'. 'Some vice-chancellors' were even forced to 'operate universities from their houses.'³⁰

Political parties have turned their attention on universities and colleges, and even schools 'for their man-power required for contesting elections, and participating in demonstrations, protest marches and processions', and 'many belonging to academic or non-academic staff' have plunged into direct political tactics for 'securing promotions through agitational politics'.³¹ The 1986-report says that a National Council of Teachers' Education established in 1973, has failed so far to guide the teachers.³² Although the percentage of trained teachers has increased

24. *Science Today* (Calcutta) October 1984, p. 76.

25. *Time* (New York) 5 October 1987, p. 50.

26. *Swami Vivekananda on India and Her Problems*, op. cit., p. 106.

27. *Learning to Be*, op. cit., pp. 154-57.

28. *Challenge of Education*, op. cit., p. 55.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 45 and 47.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

32. *National Policy on Education*, 1986, p. 194

from 56.1 in 1949-50 to 88.4 in 1982-83, the 1986-report feels an urgent need of involving teachers' associations to 'curb professional misconduct', and promote 'professional integrity'. The department of education plans to 'evolve a code of professional ethics for teachers'.³³ Probably the day is not far off when the entire student community will awaken to react to this political exploitation of their academic lives and will throw overboard the mass of money-mongers and power-grabbers parading surreptitiously as teachers sympathetic to students' cause. Recent student protests in different countries, especially in China, are an eye-opener in this line. The Republicans in USA have criticized the National Teachers' Association as 'the most misnamed organization in America'.³⁴

Nearly a century ago Vivekananda cautioned the Indians, 'Before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas deluge the land with a flood of spirituality,'³⁵ and said that 'this spirituality in a certain sense will have to become the new order of society'.³⁶ He knew that 'That society is the greatest where the highest spiritual truths become practical'. He cautioned that if India ever tried to replace the spiritual backbone with politics, she will be extinct in three generations.

More than twenty years earlier, the report of the Education commission (1964-66) warned us, 'It is only the right type of education, provided on an adequate scale that can lead to national development; when these conditions are not satisfied, the opposite effect may result.'³⁷ To day education has been offered on a much wider scale and

yet it has fallen far short of 'the right type' because of the absence of necessary provisions for moral, or spiritual education on national lines.

Three ideas clearly emerge from these two reports. First, the need of training teachers, 'the educators of the new order' of whom Vivekananda dreamt. Some voluntary organizations have done commendable job and have maintained, with a band of highly accomplished and dedicated teachers, outstanding institutions of repute. The second is the need of immediate introduction of graded topics on spiritual values. Vivekananda said, that the religion of Vedanta is the very core of education. The universal aspects of Indian culture and its modern relevance, should be included in the curriculum for compulsory study. When ideas will be available to students, the desired effect will not be far off. The third is the provision for spiritual training through meditation or prayer or regular classes on these aspects of Indian culture. Today universities have indoor stadiums used for sports and games, and also for social functions by college unions. Physical culture is a must for all students, but what we also need today is a moral-spiritual gymnasium, 'a purity-drilling' place attached to all educational institutions for regularly exploring the spiritual reserves of individual students, under the guidance of capable teachers who have got, in the words of Alvin Toffler, 'the white-hot experience that might transform our lives'. Vivekananda had in mind such a temple of universal prayer when he said, 'We must have a temple.... We will make it a non-sectarian temple, having only OM as the symbol, the greatest symbol of any sect, and at the same time the different sects should have perfect liberty to come and teach their doctrines, with only one restriction, that is, not to quarrel with other sects.'³⁸

Many of the students today are eager to

33. Ibid., p. 186.

34. *Time* (New York) 21 September 1987, p. 23.

35. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1973) Vol. 3, p. 221.

36. Ibid., p. 161.

37. *Challenge of Education* op. cit., p. 7.

learn the universal and rational ideas of Vedanta which Vivekananda called 'the science of religion' or 'the science of soul'.³⁹ Neither the curriculum nor the system has offered them anything more than a 'science of matter' or some kind of materialistic philosophy, or even worse, some political indoctrinations or fundamentalist ideologies. If education in India has to succeed, it has

38. *Swami Vivekananda on India and Her Problems*, op. cit., p. 48.

to provide for spiritual education along with secular education. There is no other way out. This was spoken out to Indians nearly a century ago by Vivekananda in a prophetic utterance:

'We must have a hold on the spiritual and secular education of the nation. Till then there is no salvation of the race'.⁴⁰

39. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (1973) op. cit., p. 160.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 277.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S VISION OF COMPLETE MAN AND TODAY'S POLITICAL THOUGHTS—I

SWAMI SOMESWARANANDA

Among all the creatures, born on this earth, man is a unique being who went through many changes since his appearance in the line of evolution of species. Interestingly, his evolution was not merely on the physical plane as we see in the case of other species, but primarily on the mental sphere. Swami Vivekananda was right when he said that Darwin's theory was not enough to explain the evolution of human beings.¹ Human evolution, says Julian Huxley, is not just physical but psycho-social. In fact, in the Vedantic vision of Vivekananda, man is a potentially perfect, complete, and divine being. A western disciple of Vivekananda who was trained to the western idea of the gradual evolution of man, was startled to hear the age-old wisdom about the innate perfection of man.

Hitherto we had believed that final emancipation and enlightenment were a matter of growth, a

gradual advance towards something higher and better, until at last the goal was reached. But from this great Master of the Ancient Wisdom we learnt that the process is not one of growth but of uncovering, of realization. The real nature of man is perfection, divinity, *now*. Nothing to be attained. The Truth is only to be realized. It is a hallucination to think that we are imperfect, limited, helpless. We are perfect, omnipotent, divine. We are that *now*. Realize it and you are free at once.²

When Sri Ramakrishna said to the devotees seeking divine grace, *tomader chaitanya hok*—'Let your consciousness be awakened', he made us realize that the higher human evolution is a spiritual evolution of the divinity already in man. Modern man knows more than his ancestors. He is more skilled and intelligent. But he is hardly aware of the 'Kingdom of God within' of which Jesus spoke, or of this innate perfection as Vedanta asserts. The goal of life is to realize this innate perfection. Only after this realization,

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979) Vol. 7, pp. 154-55. (Henceforward referred to as *Complete Works*).

2. Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1961) p. 201.

man attains to true individuality and perfect freedom by controlling the obstacles, both internal and external. This is the highest stage of human evolution.

The superabundance of materialistic pleasures and the availability of hundreds of scientific gadgets today to feed and satisfy our sense-life, have made man forget the supersensuous, the spiritual, the mystical or the intuitive aspects of life. Vivekananda reminded us that the Self within is infinitely greater and blissful than all the sense-pleasures. Due to the absence of this spiritual awareness modern man is suffering from the 'spreading plague of loneliness' as Theodore Roszak calls it. Alienation engulfs him. Unable to cope up with life's turmoil, modern man, especially in the West, is becoming a stranger to himself. Philosophers, scientists, politicians and other intellectuals are trying to solve this human problem, in order to find a way to a meaningful life. Religious leaders are speaking of God. Scientists are trying to invent new tools and medicines. Politicians are speaking of various ideologies. Yet the root of the problem seems to remain the same. How can one lead a meaningful life, with all his intelligence and his emotions? A modern man trained to rational thinking, cannot be asked to follow any scripture blindly. That is why many religious leaders fail to answer modern man's questions based on scientific rationalism. Politicians who think in their limited spheres like socialism or capitalism, are gradually losing the ground. Psychological problems have become an epidemic, but their treatment by the different schools of psychology are widely different today. We must now think anew. We must find out new dimensions of life for our meaningful existence. Let us face the reality which is going on in this world of today. Let us feel the pulse of the present and also of the past. In doing so we shall try to see which are the ideas that Swami Vivekananda has given us regarding the psycho-social evolution of man.

Sense of identity

Primitive man had hardly any sense of individual existence. He was just a member of his group. It was based on blood-relationship. Gradually this blood-relationship took various forms. Concept of clan went through some changes among various groups. The aboriginals invented the concept of 'totem' which brought more changes. The caste system was later introduced in India. The 'Aryan Blood' idea gripped the imagination of some people. Thus man's sense of identity originated from the idea of blood-relationship. For the sake of convenience let us call all the groups based on blood-relationship as 'caste'. We do not, of course, mean by this term the Indian caste-system.

When urbanization began, people started to leave their villages and congregate in the cities. Earlier people were nomads. They did not give up the idea of their group-affiliations, or group caste, though they mixed and lived with the people of other groups. When the process of urbanization intensified, they could no more maintain their original relationships based on blood. In the cities all the newcomers were strangers, and they had to adjust themselves and live wherever they got some room to live in. The kings and traders tried, however, to keep the people of the same profession in some sort of commune or ghetto. For the kings and traders it was easier if the workers, who did the same type of job, lived together. Thus gradually a new relationship grew up which was based on profession. For the time being let us call this new relationship as 'class'. The workers who originally came from villages and various tribes tried to continue their blood-relationship, but in the new situation their professional identity became more important. The sense of identity of individuals thus switched over from 'caste' to 'class'.

Since the European Renaissance individuality of man has been stressed. Man was

not satisfied with his caste or class relationships. He searched for his true identity. He tried to build his own life and future. Individuality is the cry of the present day civilization. Modern man, in spite of his various relationships, emphasizes this individuality, his individual characteristics and existence.

When someone establishes any new form of relationship with others, two types of processes follow, one is of connection, that is, he identifies himself with a particular group on the basis of country or land, race, religion, political ties, and blood relationship. The other process is of dissociation, that is, he detaches himself from those who belong to other land, religion, race, political ideology, and different blood relationship. In the modern world both these phenomena of identification and dissociation have become less rigid. Man is becoming more and more universal for which his religious and national ties are gradually becoming less important. Similarly, increase in the rate of divorce, is loosening his family ties, and politically he is becoming more liberal or less committed. Alvin Toffler in his *The Future Shock* has spoken of these 'new nomads'. Under the new circumstances modern man is more keen on his individuality, his individual likes and dislikes, unlike the man of earlier days. Social norms are less binding on him.

In his essay 'Aryans and Tamilians', Swami Vivekananda named various groups of people, namely, the Mongols, the Tartars, the Huns, the Greeks, the Negrito-Kolariana etc., who were bound together by blood-relationship which was expressed in various forms, namely, land, language, stock etc.³ The concept which we named earlier as 'caste', gradually turned in another direction based on profession. To quote Swamiji: 'Whatever caste has the power of the sword, becomes Kshatriya; whatever learning,

Brahmin; whatever wealth, Vaishya.'⁴ In the same essay he says, 'We are, in spite of our various castes, and in spite of the modern custom of marriage restricted within the sub-divisions of a caste (though this is not universal), a mixed race in every sense of the word.'⁵ In his Kumbhakonam lecture he cited the examples of how both in the West and in the East blood-relationship was still stressed which was a sign of earlier practices.⁶ Thus we find in Swami Vivekananda's works how men first established their relationship on blood, and later, on profession. However he has also shown how in the long run, men, instead of clinging to earlier relationships, started to stress their individuality. The Western countries showed the way. Swamiji says, 'The law of caste in every other country [now-a-days] takes the individual man or woman as the sufficient unit. Wealth, power, intellect, or beauty suffices for the individual to leave the status of birth and scramble up to anywhere he can.'⁷ India also started to follow suit since the British came to this country, Swamiji said.⁸

Thus we see that man's sense of identity has changed gradually from caste to class, and finally to individual existence. Swamiji discussed the merits and demerits of all these three phases of psycho-social evolution of man—'caste', 'class' and 'individuality'.

Aim of the human beings—Freedom

At the basis of all these evolutionary urges, was the primary urge of man—the indomitable desire for freedom. 'Not only religion... but the whole life of society is the assertion of that one principle of freedom. All movements are the assertions of

3. *Complete Works* (1978) vol. 4, p. 296.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 198-99.

6. *Complete Works* (1984) vol. 3, pp. 196-97

7. *Complete Works* (1978) vol. 4, p. 297.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 476-77.

that one freedom.... We are all rushing towards freedom, we are all following that voice, whether we know it or not.⁹ In his lecture 'Maya and the Evolution of the Concept of God' Swamiji showed how human experience and wisdom evolved towards true freedom with the passage of time.¹⁰

We find that Swamiji's views only corroborate the real happenings in history. Science and technology help us to be free from the shackles of external nature. With the help of political science, economics, and sociology, men try to be free from the social evils. The lesson of history is that people create new history, by eliminating old tyrannies and trying to be free from all bondages.

Again, though social freedom was the idea for which mankind collectively strove, yet struggle for individual freedom was always there. Especially in art, literature, and other aesthetic pursuits man expressed his urge for newer dimensions of life. A subjective approach towards freedom gradually developed. This desire for freedom expressed itself through a cry for democracy after the European renaissance, and especially after the French Revolution.

Human aspirations

The characteristics of man's innate struggle for freedom, according to Vivekananda, are three in number:

1. Gradual supremacy of consciousness over matter.¹¹
2. Transcending the limitations of the senses.¹²
3. Freedom: from the collective to the individual sphere.¹³

As men evolved, they tried to conquer the external nature. Primitive man was almost helpless against the forces of nature. Gradually he tried to understand the mystery behind them and tried to use the forces of nature for his own cause. Rain, storm, earthquake, scorching heat, bitter cold, and nocturnal darkness were terrible to him. But man discovered how to light a torch and win over the darkness. With the help of tree-leaves and branches he learnt to construct his hut and save himself from sun and rain. Out of leaves he made his clothes. And thus he started learning to resist the forces of nature. Gradual supremacy of man's intelligence over matter became increasingly evident. Modern science and technology helped him all the more. With the help of his brain-power the helpless primitive man evolved gradually to modern man who could even step on moon.

At the same time he tried to transcend the limitations of his senses. Why does one use specs or the telescope, or the microscope? The power of human eye is limited. He transcended that limitation with the help of lenses. With the help of telephone he transcended the limitation of his ears. He invented microphones to transcend the limitation of his voice, and manufactured crane as the power of his hands is limited. Actually, technology is used for that one purpose of transcending the limitations of our senses. What does an artist do? He is not satisfied with what his eyes present to him, what he sees directly or empirically. The artist likes to go deep. He tries to grasp the beauty that lies beyond his gross eyes. Similarly, a singer or a musician catches the subtle rhythms that go on unheard to the ordinary ear.

Revolution: Why is it always an unfinished act?

All the revolutions launched so far were aimed at people's emancipation. Yet, why

9. *Complete Works* (1983) vol. 2, p. 126.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-17.

11. *Complete Works* (1978) vol. 6, pp. 453-54.

12. *Complete Works* (1983) vol. 2, p. 59.

13. *Complete Works* (1978) vol. 6, p. 86.

do people sometimes accept bondage, even after a successful revolution? How could Napoleon appear after the great French Revolution? Why did the Russians remove the coffin of Stalin though he stood out during his life-time as the leader of Marxian socialism after the great October revolution? Military dictatorship played a crucial role in these regimes. Yet the enigmatic question remains: Why did the people succumb to that military dictatorship while just a decade ago they fought against the earlier authoritarian rule which was also based on the same kind of autocratic and military power? Does it mean that the people suffer from ambiguous mentality? Is this contradiction latent in human personality?

According to Fromm, people cannot always stand the glowing light of freedom, and so they sometimes try to avoid that scorching torch. Deutscher said that every revolution starts with vigour, restlessness, anger, and hope, and ends with frustration, exhaustion, and helplessness. He cited the examples of the French and the Russian revolutions to support his views.

Is it because there is something wrong in the political ideologies? The Western Democracy stressed human individuality, while the Marxian Socialism conceptualized man as a social being. The first approach freed man from his primitive shackles, but his individuality was threatened by loneliness and social uncertainty. On the other hand, socialism freed man as a social being, freed him from the chains of old capitalism, but did not emphasize his individuality. Western Democracy speaks of freedom while socialism stresses equality in a classless society where even the concept of State is supposed to wither away. Ironically, exactly the opposite happened. The State did not only not wither away, but became all the more totalitarian and repressive.

In the opinion of Swami Vivekananda, both equality and freedom are needed for

the full growth of man.¹⁴ Man has two aspects, social and individual. He is basically a member or a part of his society, yet he aspires to rise above the social norms, achieve a distinct individuality, and express his uniqueness. His social aspects are expressed in the form of tradition, blood-relationship, language, profession etc. There are also other socio-political and economic forces which influence his social life. Yet he feels the inner urge to be free by expressing his own individuality. Since his individuality is to be expressed in the midst of these multi-dimensional forces, he has to launch a multi-dimensional struggle. As a result, he does not evolve only one method of struggle in his life. His consciousness, in this struggle, becomes multi-dimensional. Marx insisted on the economic aspect. He spoke of economic man. So he thought that the struggle was mainly economic and thus he pictured man only as a social being, and thought of his consciousness as one-dimensional. But according to Swami Vivekananda, human consciousness is multi-dimensional as it has to cope with different forces, natural, social, political, mental and spiritual. The later Marxists like Tomson, Carr and Lahiri do not support Marx's views and present the multi-dimensional nature of human consciousness. According to Lahiri and Tomson, Marxists have failed to note this flaw in Marxism and so the ideology misled them.

Vivekananda tried to combine socialism with democratic attitude.¹⁵ Growth of individuality at the cost of the society or vice versa, was not his ideal. One must make a balance between one's social and individual aspects. Swamiji asked us to combine social equality with individual freedom.

14. Swami Vivekananda, *Patravali* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 1977) pp. 756-59.

15. Mitra Kautilya, *Vivekanander Viplab Chinta* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Sujana Publications, 1981) pp. 51-4.

Most of the political revolutions were aimed at the social freedom of man. But unless this social freedom gives rise to individual freedom, it will create new bondages. And that is why the socialist revolutions ultimately failed to emancipate men. These revolutions remained unfinished. To quote Swamiji: 'The Greek sought political liberty. The Hindu has always sought spiritual liberty. Both are one-sided.... To care only for spiritual liberty and not for social liberty is a defect, but the opposite is a still greater defect. Liberty of both soul and body is to be striven for.'¹⁶ Political liberty means freedom at the collective level and spiritual liberty is the liberty at the individual level. Swamiji stressed freedom in both the social and individual spheres. When he spoke of the ideal *atmanomokshartham jagaddhitaya cha*—for the emancipation of oneself and also for the good of the world—he combined these two sides for the development of mankind. One should struggle for one's individual freedom and, at the same time, should work for the good of the people. The collective liberty must be extended to the individual liberty. The individual liberty must be honoured in the midst of collective liberty. Unless this is done, the target of all revolution will ultimately fail. And that is why these revolutions, like the French and the Russian, remained unfinished.

World—a dog's curly tail ?

Here we would like to explain a saying of Swamiji which is so often misunderstood by many people. Swamiji once said that the world is like a dog's curly tail. What does it actually mean ? If the world remains as it is, and if it is of no use to change it, as one cannot change the shape of a dog's tail, then it presents a pessimistic picture. What did Swamiji mean when he mentioned the world as a dog's tail ? To change the world

means to make it a better place where all people will get the basic amenities for their physical existence and at the same time will get psychological fulfilment also. Now to have a better physical existence we need political and economic changes for better living along with technological advancement. Many countries have already eradicated poverty and provided the people with basic amenities. They have thus solved the problem of basic amenities. But in the case of psychological fulfilment, frustration is everywhere. Everyone tries to have this fulfilment in his or her own way. What is generally meant by psychological fulfilment today, is nothing but grabbing and running after some sensation or other. Since man's unquenchable thirst for sense-enjoyments can never be satiated, this problem cannot be solved. Ultimate freedom is true psychological freedom which is possible only through spirituality. Man attains to true freedom when he is free not only from external but also internal wants, fears or desires. This spiritual freedom was manifested in the lives of prophets like Buddha and Christ, and also in the lives of saints of all religions. Since everyone cannot and does not try for the spiritual upliftment and freedom, the world will always remain the same veil of tears and unfulfilment. Indeed, it will remain as a dog's curly tail.

Limitation of politics

Though Vivekananda explained the need of science and political ideology, yet time and again he emphasized the need of Vedantic religion for mankind to move towards true freedom. He asked the Indians to hold on to the religion of Vedanta. He warned the Western countries that if they did not lay stress on this religion of vedanta, their civilization would crumble to pieces. Why did Swamiji speak of religion time and again ? Are not science and politics enough to make people free ? There are many

16. *Complete Works* (1978) vol. 6, p. 86.

people who devoutly think that it is politics which will ultimately bring freedom to mankind.

Despite all attempts of political indoctrination especially in totalitarian regimes, a sense of alienation threatens modern man more and more. The divorce rate in the USSR is as high as in the USA. Suicide rate is the highest in Hungary, and infects other affluent societies also. Kafka (who spoke of man's helplessness) is becoming more and more popular in the East European countries. Even the Marxist countries face the same problem. In the third world countries people are heading towards the same fate. There the class-structure is becoming more and more fluid. Demoralizing effect on the poor is very much marked. The middle class has become most vocal. At the same time joint-family is on the wane, collective consciousness is getting less respect. In almost all the countries, capitalist, socialist, and the rest, people stress individuality. Neither class nor caste affiliation satisfies them any more. Due to this undue stress on individuality, they feel lonely and alienated. Neither the capitalists nor the Marxists could solve the problem. Though Marx considered man as a social being, later Marxists like Hobsbawm and Djilas highlighted the individual aspect. They agree that one can transcend one's class-consciousness. The orthodox Marxists do not, however, support this view.

Politics cannot help mankind beyond a certain point. Politics, especially socialistic politics, can keep its hold on the people if there is poverty and inequality. Men try to fight these problems with the help of poli-

tical ideology and activities. When these problems are less, people do not feel attracted to politics any more. In USA students and the people at large are not much interested in active politics. In USSR also the same is the trend today. Only in the third world countries, politics attract the people. But if the rulers are intelligent enough, they will take necessary measures to eradicate poverty and inequality, because only through these measures they can keep their chairs intact. Western countries have already demonstrated this by introducing social welfare schemes as initiated by Marshall, Pigou, and Keynes. The rulers of the third world countries are also realizing the truth that if they become successful in eradicating poverty, politics will lose its charm for the common people, as is the case with the capitalist and Marxist countries. Actually politics concerns itself to provide the basic needs of the people like food, clothing, shelter and education. Once these problems are solved to a great extent, politics cannot give people anything more. Politics is needed to solve the problems concerning mainly with man's physical existence. But the acute psychological or spiritual problems which a modern man faces today, cannot be solved by politics alone. Politics makes man free from poverty or hunger. As a branch of sociology politics views man as one of the masses, and not as an individual man with the great spiritual potentiality of a Buddha or a Christ. Politics is, at Bottom, a philosophy of the masses, and not of complete man. This mass-outlook character of politics has to be modified if it has to face the problems of modern man.

(To be continued)

TRAILANGA SWAMI : A LEGEND IN HIS LIFE-TIME

PROF. SAMARENDRA KRISHNA BOSE

The unforgettable Trailanga Swami was a man who had become a legend even in his life-time. People used to call him 'the Viswanath incarnate' of Benaras. Mist of mystery covers his birth and span of life, as well as his marriage and parentage. Some of his disciples believe that he lived for a period of 280 years, an incredible longevity of about three centuries! But according to others, he was in the land of the living only for 91 years. Unanimity is found, however, in the matter of his demise. It was in the month of Pausha, 1294 B.S., corresponding to December 1887. The year 1987 was, therefore, the death-centenary-year of this great saint of India.

Trailanga Swami was a historical person, and no character of a fiction. He lived, moved, and had his being amongst us within living memory. Our lack of knowledge about his life, particularly, his pre-monastic life or *purvashrama*, is therefore solely to be attributed to our want of historical sense.

It is indeed a matter of great regret that Trailanga Swami had no Boswell, as Sri Ramakrishna had in M., to note down with meticulous fidelity, the words and deeds of his day-to-day life. The few biographies of the Swami that are extant, are written by his disciples and followers who came in his contact during the last phase of his surprisingly long life. So the story of his, prior to his renouncing the worldly life, remains mostly enveloped in oblivion. Even in this meager sketch of his life, chronology is conspicuous by its absence.

He was born in a Brahmin family at a village named Holia (or Halwana) in Vijayanagaram within the then Madras Presidency. There is controversy even about his pre-monastic name. Some of his biographers believe that his original name was Shivarama, while some hold it to be Ganapati. And a

third, and more generally accepted, opinion is that it was Trailangadhar. His father's name was Nrsinghadhar and that of his mother Vidyavati.

As in the case of most other saints, Trailangadhar's birth is also associated with a miracle. Just before her conception, Vidyavati was once engaged in the worship of their house-hold deity, Shankara, at His temple. A fair-looking child came to her and begged Prasad (offerings of fruit and sweets) of the deity. Vidyavati at once came out of the temple with Prasad in hand, but found the child nowhere. She related this strange happening to her husband who interpreted it to be a sign of her pregnancy. The prediction proved true and in due time Trailangadhar was born.

During the early years of his life, Trailanga was indifferent to studies. He accompanied his mother to the temple of Shankara and joined his mother in her worship. He was of a religious temperament and sat for hours, deep in meditation, under a banyan tree near his dwelling house, quite unmindful of hunger and sleep. This other-worldliness of Trailangadhar worried his parents, and he was given in marriage.

Here again controversy rages among his biographies. According to one view he was given in marriage by his mother, and a son and a daughter were born to him. But this is contradicted by others who hold that it was his mother who dissuaded his father from giving him in marriage as she had realized that Trailanga's whole being was dedicated to God. She, however, elicited from Trailanga the promise that he would not renounce the world so long as his parents would remain alive. Trailanga kept his promise and did not desert his parents during their life-time. He, however, did not return home from the burning-ghat where he had

carried his mother's corpse for cremation. He was then thirty years of age. From that day, Trailanga lived the austere life of a recluse at a cottage built near the burning-ghat. He remained there for ten years, absorbed in the meditation of Shiva. His father then died and Trailanga was absolved of his vow. He had reached, by this time, his fortieth year.

Trailanga now embraced the life of a pilgrim and travelled throughout the length and breadth of India and her neighbouring lands, such as Nepal and Tibet. First he came to the holy city of Benaras and proceeded thence, on foot, to the banks of Narmada in South India. There he spent a few years in ascetic practices, and then made a tour of several holy places of pilgrimage in South India. Next he came to Puri and became the guest of a childless Brahmin who obtained a son by his blessing. After this, he came, in course of his tour, to the village, Bastoor in Punjab. There he became acquainted with Bhagirath Swami, who later took him to the holy pilgrimage of Pushkar and initiated him into a life of asceticism.

After Bhagirath Swami's death, Trailanga came to Rameswar and from there journeyed to the holy places, Pravas and Dwaraka. Thereafter he went to Nepal, where he practised yoga for long years inside a solitary cave and thereby acquired supernatural powers. As soon as his miraculous powers became known, people crowded round him with their innumerable prayers and supplications. In order to avoid such vexations, that stood in the way of his meditation and ascetic life, Trailanga fled from his seat of seclusion and came to the pilgrimage of Bhimarathi in U.P. Here Swami Vidyananda Saraswati of Sringeri Math initiated him into sannyasa (monastic life) and gave him, as symbols of a sannyasi, *danda* (a sacred rod) and *Kamandalu* (a holy water-pot) and Trailanga became Swami Ramananda Saraswati.

He took from his Guru (preceptor) lessons on holy scriptures. His guru also initiated him into the occult processes of Yoga. He remained there for five years and thoroughly mastered the *Hatha-Yoga* and the *Raja-Yoga*. He gained, as a result, supernatural powers of moving at will, as tradition believes, on sky, land and water.

As directed by his preceptor, Swami Vidyananda, Trailanga next visited Tibet and Manasa sarovar. Then he came to Markendeya Ashrama on the shores of the Narmada. This Ashrama was inhabited then by many sadhus (monks), among whom one, named Khaki Baba, was revered by all. Trailanga was not looked with favour by these monks, especially, Khaki Baba. They insulted and persecuted him in various ways. Then a miracle was seen by Khaki Baba with his own eyes that changed his whole attitude to Trailanga Swami. He noticed with amazement the waters of the Narmada suddenly turning into milk and Trailanga Swami drinking palmfuls of it. After the departure of Trailanga Swami, he eagerly rushed to drink the milk but found to his disappointment nothing but the waters flowing on as ever. He fell at the feet of Trailanga Swami, and begged forgiveness. The other monks followed suit.

Trailanga Swami's next destination was Prayag at Allahabad, where he carried on his austere spiritual exercises for a number of years. He then travelled about in the secluded regions of the Himalayas for several years. Finally he settled down at Benaras where he spent the remaining years of his surprisingly long life.

He built his hermitage on the bank of Pancha Ganga at Benaras, by the side of the temple of the deity Bindumadhav. During this period he observed absolute silence most of the time. A Brahmin from Maharashtra, Mangaldasa by name, devoutly served him day and night. This Mangaldasa had acquired the knowledge of Trailanga Swami's signs and signals by which he ex-

pressed his mind and communicated them verbally to the innumerable devotees who came daily to visit him.

Uma Charan Mukherji, who later became one of Trailanga Swami's most devoted disciples and one of his few biographers, had been cherishing in his mind a great desire to be convinced of the veracity of the doctrine of re-birth and came, for that purpose, to the Swami. After having been turned out several times by the Swami, he succeeded at last, by the assistance of Mangaldasa, in winning his favour and obtaining from him a satisfactory confirmation of the principle of antenatal existence. Trailanga Swami then told him that he had been a Brahmin land-lord in his previous birth, and gave him a detailed description of the place of his birth and the great mansion in which he used to live. He also told him specifically that he had his south-facing bed-room on the first floor and above the entrance-door, on the inner side of the wall, there were Sanskrit shlokas (verses) written with his own hand. He further added that the mansion with the Shlokas still stood there. Uma Charan took down the Shlokas as they were recited by the Swami.

Uma Charan had an opportunity of verifying the validity of this fact when he accepted a certain service under the direction of the Swami and was posted at Golaghat in Assam. A newly-appointed overseer came to live with him there. Uma learnt from him the whereabouts of his father-in-law's house and found, to his surprise, that it was the same in which he had lived in his previous birth. To satisfy his curiosity, he wrote a letter to the father-in-law of the overseer, requesting him to send him in reply a copy of the said Shlokas inscribed on the wall. The request was complied with and Uma Charan's amazement knew no bounds, when he saw that they were the same as told by the Swami.

Once the king of Ujjaini was out on a journey by boat on the Ganges and was

coming towards Manikarnika Ghat at Benaras. A miraculous sight suddenly caught his eyes—that of Trailanga Swami floating along the surface of the water, seated in the posture of meditation. Out of curiosity the Raja ordered the boat to be taken to him. As soon as the boat came within his reach, the Swami boarded it of his own accord. The Raja was then wearing a valuable sword that he had received from East India Company as a reward for his heroic feats. Trailanga Swami took the sword from the Raja and after looking admirably at it for a few minutes, dropped it into the Ganges. The Raja grew furious and began to abuse the Swami who, however, remained placid and unmoved. When the boat reached near Manikarnika ghat, Trailanga Swami dipped both his hands into the water and brought up two swords, one in each hand. They looked so alike that even the Raja failed to identify the one that belonged to him. The Swami smiled and gave the Raja his own one and threw the other into the Ganges.

Instances may be multiplied, but they all point to the singular fact of the Swami's power of working miracles. It is his ability to accomplish miracles that distinguishes Trailanga Swami among the great saints of India. On account of this he became a legendary figure even in his life-time. Patanjali's Yoga-sutra tells us that such supernatural powers do come to a spiritual aspirant when he reaches an advanced spiritual state. In his discourse on *Raja-Yoga*, Swami Vivekananda, in the chapter entitled 'Vibhuti Yoga' discusses, with suitable references from the Vedas and Upanishads, the means for attaining supernatural powers. These are known as *ashta-siddhi* or perfection in the development of eight faculties by ascetic austerities. Such a Yogi is able to conquer time and space. He is then gifted with prevision, clairvoyance, thought-reading, thought-transference, psychometry and such other psychic powers. He can move through

air, water, and land at will, with incredible speed. He can live as long as he likes and dies only when he so desires.

These Vibhutis or supernatural powers, however, belong to a comparatively low rung in the ladder of spirituality. They deter, generally, the votary's progress to the climax of spirituality, which is to effect the reunion of the devotee's soul with the Universal Spirit. For this reason Sri Ramakrishna had an aversion for such superhuman powers. Though in the course of ascetic exercises, Sri Ramakrishna had gained such supernatural powers, he scrupulously abstained from employing them in practice.

The most posterior of the four Vedas, the *Atharva Veda*, contains rituals and incantations by which superhuman powers may be acquired. These powers, however, fall under two categories, namely, *abhyudaic*—relating to welfare, and *abhicharic*—pertaining to mischief.

Though Trailanga Swami gained complete mastery in Hatha Yoga and was blessed with *ashta-siddhi*, he however, always employed his super-human powers for the alleviation of miseries and afflictions of others. He never held them for his personal ends. Stories of such miraculous powers in the life of Trailanga Swami are circulated among devotees. Once at Prayag Trailanga Swami was practising Yoga on the banks of Ganges. There raged a violent storm and heavy rains followed. A Brahmin, Ramtaran by name, offered to shelter the Swami by taking him to his house. But the Swami declined the offer. He pointed out to a storm-tossed boat on the Ganges and said that he would have to save it. Just then the boat capsized and sank into the depth of the waters with its passengers, and simultaneously Trailanga Swami disappeared from his seat of meditation. A moment later Ramtaran saw to his astonishment, the boat reappearing on the surface of the waves and Trailanga Swami standing nude on it amidst its passengers.

On another occasion, while engaged in ascetic practices at Manasa Sarovar, Trailanga Swami's heart melted at the bitter wailing of a mother who had lost her seven-year-old son. He gave life to the dead son and earned the whole-hearted respect and gratitude of the bereaved mother.

Yet the true greatness of the life of this great yogi never lay in miracles which, of course, inspired veneration and faith in the minds of worldly people who expected from this yogi some help to get relief from their sufferings. Trailanga Swami's greatness lies in his own great life. He believed, as Sri Ramakrishna said, in the formless aspect of God. And when he became truly aware of the One all-pervading unity he became silent. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'How long does a man reason and discriminate? As long as he is conscious of the manifold, as embodied beings, of "I" and "you". He becomes silent when he is truly aware of the Unity. This was the case with Trailanga Swami.' Sri Ramakrishna paid a visit to this Paramahansa, the perfected soul, and described his greatness in these unforgettable words: 'I saw that the Universal Lord Himself was using the Swami's body to manifest His presence. All Benaras was illumined by his stay there. He was in an exalted state of knowledge. He had no body-consciousness. The sand there gets so hot in the sun that no one can walk on it; but he lay on it comfortably. I cooked rice pudding and brought it with me and fed him with it. At that time, he couldn't speak to me because he had taken a vow of silence. So I asked him by signs whether Ishwara was one or many. He replied by signs that Ishwara is known to be one when a man enters the state of samadhi; but as long as any consciousness of "I" and "You" persists, Ishwara is perceived as many. I told Hriday, "In him you see the condition of a true Knower of Brahman."

Worldly people who admired and expected

ted miracles from this saint made his life virtually shrouded in miracles. In fact a halo has encircled his visage with the passage of a century that tend to hide his real self. Myths of miracles have been ascribed to him by his devotees to deify him, with the result that one is left dubious in one's mind as to whether he was actually born in this world of flesh and blood or directly descended from heaven!

In this connection it may not be irrelevant to mention that Swami Vivekananda noticed in some devotees this tendency of deification in the case of his Master, and so expressed his desire for a biography in which his Master should be portrayed, with the greatest possible objectivity, as he really was. 'Write a life of Sri Ramakrishna studiously avoiding all miracles', he said. If this salutary advice had been followed by the biographers of Trailanga Swami, we would have got an authentic life of a Paramahansa who lived a great life of God-realization.

In the month of Agrahayana, 1294 B.S., Uma Charan, the disciple of Trailanga Swami, got a letter from the Swami in which he informed him of his desire to leave this world a month later, and requested him to come to his hermitage at Pancha-Ganga in Benaras to make preparations for his cremation. Accordingly, Uma Charan reached the place of his preceptor about a

fortnight prior to the settled date of the Swami's demise.

Trailanga Swami gave direction to Uma Charan and his other disciples to prepare a chest spacious enough to contain his body. He then told them that his corpse should be laid inside the chest and its lid should be screwed up and it should be immersed in the waters of the Pancha-Ganga.

The appointed day of death arrived. It was the eleventh day of the bright fortnight in the month of Pausha, 1294 B.S. corresponding to December 1887. Trailanga Swami entered his meditation-chamber at about 9'0 clock in the morning and shut its doors and windows. He ordered his disciples not to open the door until they heard knocking from within. In the afternoon such knockings were heard and the door was opened. The Swami came out with slow-moving steps and sat in deep meditation at the corridor. By and by, he passed away, while still absorbed in the state of Samadhi. The Sun was then setting in the western horizon and its crimson rays tinged the waves of the Pancha-Ganga.

A marble statue has been erected in the meditation-chamber of the Swami. It looks so life-like as to create in the mind of the spectator an illusion that the Swami is serenely seated in his Yoga.

REFLECTIONS ON THE MEANING OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA FOR WOMEN—I

[*Chandra Devi and Rani Rasmani*]

ANN MYREN

The topic of women is current. For the first time in history women are being seen as a class of autonomous human beings. As a result of this new recognition many women are questioning the values and social systems of male-dominated societies in which

they live. Every tradition regarding the activities and position of woman is being challenged. A huge change is underway, an enormous shift in humanity's way of life is taking place. In order to see our way through conflicting beliefs, opinions, and ideas about

women, we need to know the truth.

Today woman's self-perception, goals, duties—the whole definition of woman is in disarray. Neither women nor men know exactly what to expect of women, nor which avenues of development are the best suited to women. It is time to go to the root of the matter, to redefine woman, to find out exactly what she is so that woman can attain her highest potential and by doing so bring the greatest benefit to society. To redefine woman we need to consider her as a spiritual being, because only an understanding of the spiritual character of woman can give us a true picture. What better source of knowledge could we go to than that great God-man, Sri Ramakrishna, whose very essence was truth?

In general women all over the world need to be raised so that they can fully manifest their capacities, abilities, and powers. The *power* necessary to raise women is spiritual, not social, economic, or political. However, spiritual upliftment will lead to improved conditions for both women and society. On this point Swami Vivekananda used to say, 'A bird cannot fly on one wing', a direct reference to the low position of women, and to the fact that if humanity is to be raised, women must be raised first.¹ Further, Nivedita quoted Swami Vivekananda as often saying, 'Never forget! the word is, "Woman and the People!"'² In both instances Swamiji was referring to the teaching of Sri Ramakrishna.

A careful examination of the lives of the women who knew Sri Ramakrishna and of their relationship to him will demonstrate the relevance and importance of his life and teachings for the women of this age. Only

through such an analysis can we understand how women can correctly deal with this new age. Further, we should examine Sri Ramakrishna's life to see how he regarded the feminine. By understanding his teachings, women and men can learn how to respond correctly to *every* condition of life. It is a new age, and it is for this new age that Sri Ramakrishna was born. Great God-men are not born to recapture the past, but to bring truth to coming generations, to teach future generations how to live.

We will begin at the beginning with Sri Ramakrishna's mother, Chandra Devi. With the exception of a few years, she lived either in the same dwelling with Sri Ramakrishna or very near him until she died in 1875 or 1876. Actually they lived separately for less than five-and-a-half years from the time of his birth until she died. Thus for over thirty-four years Sri Ramakrishna saw his mother everyday. She loved him deeply, was concerned about his mental state during his God-intoxicated days, and often cautioned him to eat only what was good for his delicate digestion. When he was at Dakshineswar, he loved to return to his village for his Mother's cooking; there was none like hers. He was always her son. Is it any wonder that the Master had a filial attitude towards all women all of his life. He used to tell a story from the Puranas to his disciples at Dakshineswar to illustrate this attitude.

It seems that the boy Ganesh, son of the goddess Parvati, tortured a cat. The result was that wounds appeared on the body of Parvati. Ganesh asked his mother about the injuries, and she replied that he, Ganesh, had inflicted the wounds on her. Of course Ganesh could not recall doing any such thing. Then his mother explained to him that it was she who had taken the form of the cat and that was why the injuries were seen on her body. Ganesh was cautioned*to remember that female forms are parts of Parvati Devi and male forms part of his father. Thus there are no persons in the

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 8 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1956) 6:330.

2. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, 4 vols. (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1957), 1:193,

world except Shiva and Shakti, his father and mother.³ The Master said again and again that woman is the embodiment of Shakti, the divine creative power. And time and again throughout his life, when in the company of women, he assumed the relationship of son.

What kind of person was his mother, Chandra Devi, with whom he had such a long and intimate relationship? She was renowned in her village for her forbearance and attention to the needs of others. She never ate until everyone in the village had something to eat.⁴ In spite of her own family's poverty, Chandra Devi was generous to everyone, including the wandering holy men to whom she always gave alms.⁵ Besides being generous and joyful, she had an unusually spiritual nature. Before the birth of Gadadhar (Gadadhar was Sri Ramakrishna's boyhood name), Chandra Devi had many visions of gods and goddesses.⁶ One experience is of particular importance. When she was standing in front of the Shiva temple, a light engulfed her. She felt that the light entered into her womb and that she was pregnant. She told her husband, Kshudiram, who had already had a revelation that a son would be born to them in a supernatural way.⁷

Chandra Devi's visions seemed to be very much a part of her normal life. When she described them to her husband and later to her friend, Dhani, both advised her not to mention them to anyone else. She was a most unusual woman, very pure and natural, to whom spiritual experiences were not uncommon.

Chandra Devi was also very open-hearted, kind, and considerate to others. She was

wise. Gadadhar learned many things from her. For example, she taught Gadadhar to respect women. One day the women of the village told the little boys, Gadadhar among them, not to watch them bathe. Little Gadadhar wanted to know why women should not be seen undressed, but he did not receive a reasonable answer. So he hid in the bushes to watch again to see if anything would happen to him. Nothing did, and he told his mother about it. She carefully instructed him to respect all women. She did this by telling him that when he watched the women bathe, they would feel insulted. She pointed out that the village women were not different from her. Thus if he insulted them, he was insulting her. If he showed the village women dishonour, he also dishonoured his own mother.⁸ We can see from this one example what an excellent mother Chandra Devi was as she taught Gadadhar to respect women.

This respect for women that Gadadhar learned from his mother was strengthened by his own spiritual practices later on, ultimately maturing into the recognition of the divinity of women. It is easy to see how Chandra Devi laid the groundwork for this principle of truth which Sri Ramakrishna practised all of his life. Also we should note that this mother-son bond between Chandra Devi and Gadadhar foreshadowed the relationship that he would establish with the Mother Goddess Kali when he took up her worship at Dakshineswar. There he chose to view himself as Kali's child and Kali as his mother; this became his life-long attitude toward the Goddess. It was his own mother Chandra Devi, who demonstrated to perfection the beauty of this relationship.

Of course, one might ask if these experiences in and of the world have any meaning for a person of such great spiritual stature as Sri Ramakrishna. The answer to that

3. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1952). pp. 197-8.

4. Ibid., p. 35.

5. Ibid., p. 25.

6. Ibid., p. 37.

7. Ibid., p. 36.

8. Ibid., p. 46.

question is that every single action, circumstance, relationship, in general everything which Sri Ramakrishna said, did, or experienced has significance, importance, and meaning for humanity. His great role on this earth is as teacher, a person who by his life can tell us how to realize the very truth he realized. He is the sage, the rishi, the prophet, the knower of God who by his life teaches us how to live, act, and use our minds to gain the ultimate truth. We should practise his teachings which transcend culture. These teachings are universal. So when we see, for example, his high regard for woman as mother, we should pay attention. There is, indeed, a message for woman as mother, we should pay attention. There is, indeed, a message for humanity here.

Another example of Gadadhar's behaviour toward women and also toward truth was in his attitude toward Dhani. Dhani was a woman of the blacksmith caste who wanted to give him alms at the time of his investiture with the sacred thread. Gadadhar's eldest brother objected because of her caste. However Gadadhar won out over his brother by pointing out that if he did not keep his promise to Dhani, he would not be worthy of the sacred thread.⁹ So Dhani was allowed to give little Gadadhar alms. We see here that Gadadhar respected and loved Dhani, a low caste woman, so much that he insisted she be treated with respect and affection. The boy is father to the man, and in later life regardless of the social status of a woman, he always assumed the attitude of a son, never scorning or demeaning any woman, always seeing her divinity.

We must understand that many incidents of Gadadhar's boyhood centered around women, if we are to have a full appreciation of the knowledge of women which Sri Ramakrishna had later on. Gadadhar was very

independent. He quit school at the age of fourteen because he was not interested in a money-making education. So he had much time to be with the villagers, including women, in the rather free and easy village life. In fact he was very popular with the village women and for good reason. Gadadhar had the talent of story teller, singer, and actor.

Frequently the village women would come to Chandra Devi's house, help Gadadhar finish his chores, and then sit and listen to him sing and tell religious stories. As an actor he was superb. He could imitate women perfectly and with the help of ornaments and women's dress, he would act just like a woman in voice and gestures. Sometimes he would disguise himself so well that men would take him for a woman.¹⁰ Now what does this really have to do with the importance of Sri Ramakrishna for women? Just this. His acting a woman's role put him in touch with the feminine side of his own personality, which he came to express at different times in his life. Sri Ramakrishna had for women an internal understanding of what it means to be a woman.

Even at a young age Gadadhar was very perceptive about the condition of women. He saw the shortcomings of the confining system of purdah and asserted that the only way women could be protected was by their own moral training and their devotion to God. One of the villagers, Durgadas Pyne, took Gadadhar's words as a challenge, insisting that no one had ever seen the women of his family or been in the women's inner apartments. Gadadhar loved fun, but he also had very liberal ideas for a village boy.

To prove that Durgadas was wrong, Gadadhar cleverly disguised himself as a weaver woman who had been left behind at the end of market day. By begging Durgadas for a place to spend the night, Gadadhar

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-5.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 62-3.

was directed to go to the women's rooms. Of course, this prank was revealed when Rameswar, Gadadhar's elder brother, came looking for him and he emerged from the inner apartments. This was a lesson for Durgadas, who henceforth allowed the women of his household to go to Sitanath's house when Gadadhar was there.¹¹ This was a small but significant liberalization of Durgadas' rules. But more important, it was a forecast of the future when the Master taught that women should be independent, even though married.

Gadadhar was the next to last of Chandra Devi's children. Ramkumar, his eldest brother, was thirty-one years older than he. Ramkumar's wife died in 1849, giving birth to Akshay. Gadadhar's father, Kshudiram, had already died in 1843. It fell to Chandra Devi to raise Akshay, and her chief helper in this task was Gadadhar, who was thirteen when Akshay was born. Gadadhar attended school for a while longer in order to be with his playmates, but he also helped Chandra Devi around the house. Thus daily he took care of Akshay, holding him on his lap and playing with him; naturally he became very fond of Akshay.¹² Already at this early age the future Sri Ramakrishna had taken on household duties which generally belong to women. He saw how hard his mother worked, how much she had to do, and he did what he could to help. So from an early age he had an accurate view of the duties of women. He knew firsthand how much was involved in taking care of a family, minding the children, cooking, and cleaning. Obviously this early life with his mother was important in shaping his comprehensive understanding of women.

Gadadhar loved the gods and goddesses. He worshipped them, play-acted their roles, sang to them and about them. He was a God-centered youth. He used to live the

mood of the Gopis—the simple-hearted milkmaids of Vrindavan—who looked upon Sri Krishna as their Beloved and experienced Him as the embodiment of pure Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. He even saw his male body as an obstruction to the attainment of Krishna and hence his wish to have a female body.¹³ This love of Krishna as practised by women was undertaken in his sadhana later on, and his childhood desire was actually fulfilled.

It is easy to see that in his early life in the village, the boy who was to become Sri Ramakrishna already had a personality which transcended the usual limitations of gender. Apparently he did not feel that the masculine and feminine genders were poles apart. He could easily imagine himself to be a girl and did not feel that this was against his nature. He play-acted women's roles very successfully, showing that strong feelings of masculinity did not limit his personality.

When the sixteen year old Gadadhar moved to Calcutta in 1852, he lived with Ramkumar, his oldest brother, at Ramkumar's school. This is the beginning of the short five-year period in which he did not live either with or near his mother, but visited her in Kamarpukur. Three years after Gadadhar's arrival in Calcutta, Ramkumar performed the consecration ceremonies of the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. This temple was built by Rani Rasmani, a person of great importance and consequence in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Keeping in mind Sri Ramakrishna's statement that she 'was one of the eight *nayikas* (attendant goddesses) of the Divine Mother', who had come down to spread the worship of the Divine Mother,¹⁴ let us consider her life and character.

Rani Rasmani was born in September 1793, about thirty miles from Calcutta; she was named Rasmani, but her mother nick-

11. Ibid., pp. 64-5.

12. Ibid., p. 69.

13. Ibid., p. 239.

14. Ibid., p. 422.

named her Rani, queen. Her Vaishnava family was poor but devout. It was very fortunate for her in later life that Rani's father had taught her to read and write Bengali. At the age of eleven she was married to Rajchandra, son of a wealthy Calcutta landlord. Rajchandra himself was a successful businessman and his fortune grew. Rasmani remained unaffected by wealth, serving her husband, managing the house, and performing worship and spiritual practices. Rajchandra always consulted her before making important business decisions.¹⁵ Thus he benefitted from her clear-headedness, and she gained useful knowledge about the management of money and property.

Rajchandra and Rani Rasmani were not selfish people. With their wealth they were able to undertake many projects to help others, especially the poor. Some of the things they did were to feed and house the afflicted, build bathing ghats, and construct a new road. No doubt Rani Rasmani had many memories of the hard times of her childhood, of her mother's struggle to manage the household on very little, and her father's determined efforts to maintain the family.

Rani Rasmani bore four daughters. Karuna, her third daughter, had been married to Mathuranath Biswas, but she had died in 1833. Thereupon the Rani asked Mathur to marry her fourth daughter, Jagadamba, and he agreed. Then suddenly in 1836 the Rani's husband, Rajchandra, died from apoplexy. Rani Rasmani was now forty-three and a widow. Fortunately Mathur had remained a part of her family and from him she continued to get help in the management of the estate. Although the other two daughters were married, Rani preferred Mathur's help to that of her other sons-in-

law.¹⁶ Rani was a very good judge of management talent having always been included in her husband's business decisions and having participated with him in numerous charitable projects.

The years passed. Rani lived in a huge palace built by her husband. She attended to the business of her estate, but also spent much time and money on religious festivals. She spent on celebrations, she spent on the needy, and she remained God-centered. Although she was lavish in gifts to the poor, there was more to her devotion than a demonstration of wealth. One of her great celebrations was Durga Puja. At one of these festivals an Englishman got the police to stop the music as the musicians marched to the Ganga. The Rani was fined. The next day she had the road barricaded so that no one could pass through. This was a road that she had built, so the government could do nothing. Finally the amount of the fine was paid back to her and she opened the road. Obviously Rani Rasmani was both strong and courageous. An even more striking example of her courage occurred when some soldiers invaded her palace, overcame the guards, and proceeded to create havoc, ransacking and destroying everything. What did Rani Rasmani do? She grabbed an unsheathed sword and blocked the entrance to the shrine. Fortunately the soldiers did not come to that area of the palace, but nevertheless had they come, Rani Rasmani was ready to die in the protection of her holy shrine.¹⁷

Courageous, strong, a great devotee of the Mother, Rani Rasmani's monumental task still lay ahead, a task which would test her strength, courage and devotion. Little did she know what was in store for her as she planned a pilgrimage to Varanasi. But the pilgrimage never took place because Rani Rasmani had a dream that would

15. Swami Chetanananda, 'Rani Rasmani' *Prabuddha Bharata* (Calcutta) Vol. 88. November, 1983, p. 451.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 452.

17. Swami Chetanananda, 'Rani Rasmani', *Prabuddha Bharata* (Calcutta) Vol. 88. December, 1983, p. 490.

change her life and the lives of countless other persons. Just one night before the planned departure for Varanasi, the Divine Mother appeared to her in a dream, saying, 'You need not go to Varanasi. Install my image on a beautiful spot along the bank of the Ganga and arrange for my worship and offerings there. In this image I shall be constantly present and ever accept your worship.'¹⁸ The pilgrimage was immediately cancelled and the funds were set aside to buy land for Divine Mother's temple.

After some searching for land, a spot was selected at Dakshineswar and the construction of the temple buildings began. It was then 1847. We can only assume that Rani Rasmani was the general overseer of this undertaking. Of course she had the capable Mathur to assist in directing the work, but it seems very unlikely that she would let it completely out of her own hands, particularly when we consider her competence in business matters, what to speak of her devotion to the Divine Mother. Emblazoned on her seal were the words 'Sri Rasmani Dasi desirous of realizing the feet of Kali'. The building of the temple was not only the fulfilment of the Divine Mother's command, but also a step toward the ideal expressed on her seal. It took more than eight years to complete all of the temples and buildings. Sri Ramakrishna himself said that the Rani's devotion to the Goddess was expressed in all her words and actions.¹⁹

The whole project was almost completed by 1855. However, it was decided to dedicate the Divine Mother's temple first without waiting for the completion of the other temples and buildings. Rani Rasmani had one major hurdle to overcome. She was not a Brahmin, and only Brahmins could dedicate temples where cooked food could be offered to God and holy men could take the

prasada. Once again we see something of the character of the Rani when we consider the strict caste rules that prevailed in India in the mid-nineteenth century and her courage in standing up to these rules. Firm in her knowledge of the Divine Mother's command and willing to consult many authorities on such matters, Rasmani found a way of getting around the rules. She was indeed persistent in the pursuit of her divinely conceived goal. Finally this problem was overcome when Ramkumar, Gadadhar's older brother, suggested that the temple be deeded to a Brahmin who would then arrange for the installation of the Kali image and for the cooking of the food which would be offered to Kali.²⁰ This advice was taken and soon the temple was dedicated, but only after a second dream of the Rani's.

The Rani dreamed that the Divine Mother commanded her to install her image as soon as possible. So it was done, and this was how Ramkumar, who officiated at the installation, came to be a priest at the Dakshineswar temple. Ramkumar closed his school, and soon Gadadhar followed him to Dakshineswar, and after some persuasion took the job of dressing the image of Kali. Eventually Gadadhar took over the Kali worship, and then began his great sadhana.²¹ It did not take long for Gadadhar, now called Ramakrishna, to attain the vision of the Divine Mother. He experienced Her both as a sea of light and as a form.²² From this time on the Master became the child of Kali, keeping in constant communion with Her, seeking Her help and counsel. Kali, on Her part, brought him everyone and everything he needed for his sadhana.

This relationship of Sri Ramakrishna and the Divine Mother is significant beyond our comprehension. However, one obvious fact can be pointed out. The fact that the Master

18. Ibid., p. 491.

19. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, op. cit., p. 115.

20. Ibid., p. 117.

21. Ibid., p. 130.

22. Ibid., p. 141.

chose to express his divinity in a relationship with a female Goddess, the Divine Mother, points toward the elevation of all womankind. It is the Divine Mother who dwells in all, who is the ultimate symbol of the feminine, and who was worshipped by Sri Ramakrishna, the greatest God-man of the age. What more could be done to elevate women than to worship this feminine-divinity and to worship the feminine as divinity?

In 1858 there was one other very important experience of the Master's which must be discussed. Sri Ramakrishna had been practising devotion to Rama in the servant attitude (*dasya-bhava*). One day he was sitting with his eyes open when he had the vision of Sita. She appeared before him as an effulgent female figure, not as a goddess, but as a woman who was grave, and compassionate, manifesting love, sorrow and endurance. Suddenly he recognized the woman as Sita and was about to throw himself at her feet when she came toward him and entered into his body. The Master fell down, unconscious. Later the Master suggested that he suffered like Sita because his first external vision had been of Sita.²³ As we all know, Sita's life was one of suffering and forbearance. This comment by the Master is very significant because it indicates that in the vision, when the goddess entered into his body, he took on the characteristics of the goddess.

Rani Rasmani lived for only six years after the Divine Mother's temple was dedicated. During these years she often stayed at Dakshineswar in the Kuthi, a large mansion of many rooms close to Divine Mother's temple. Also Mathur and his family, and the other daughters stayed there off and on. And in this same building Sri Ramakrishna lived in a room on the ground floor.²⁴

23. Ibid., p. 158.

24. Pravrajika Atmaprana, ed., *Sri Ramakrishna's Dakshineswar* (New Delhi: Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, 1986) p. 19.

From the beginning of his worship of Kali, the mood of spiritual teacher began to manifest in Sri Ramakrishna, and gradually Rani Rasmani came to revere and love her youthful priest as her teacher.²⁵ At this time many of Sri Ramakrishna's actions were unusual, for he was filled with divine madness. But the Rani never wavered in her love and reverence for him. Such steadiness indicates her liberal mind and her unswerving devotion to him. Sometimes the Rani would come to the temple and ask the Master to sing for her. Forgetting the world, he would sing and become absorbed in the Divine Mother.

Early in his spiritual practice Sri Ramakrishna became so mad with divine love that people actually came to believe that he was insane. The Rani and Mathur decided to do something about this madness. Their plan involved bringing prostitutes to tempt the Master, break his continence, which, they thought, would restore his sanity. But the plan fell to pieces when Sri Ramakrishna saw the Divine Mother in all the women, and they felt only maternal feelings toward him.²⁶ Of course the Rani and Mathur realized they had committed an awful deed, and begged his pardon. Perhaps this incident verified the fact for the Rani and Mathur that the Master's actions did indeed spring from divine inspiration. The experience surely must have convinced the Rani of the absolute purity of Sri Ramakrishna.

The most widely known incident in the life of Rani Rasmani happened when Sri Ramakrishna slapped her. He did this because she was having worldly thoughts when she was supposed to be listening to the Master sing, which he was doing at her request. The officials of the temple became very agitated, threatening to expel Sri Ramakrishna, but the Rani and the Master re-

25. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, op. cit., pp. 415-6.

26. Ibid., p. 172.

mained calm.²⁷ Then Rani Rasmani explained that Sri Ramakrishna was not to be blamed; instead she took the blame for her own inattentive mind. This incident shows us something about the powers of the Master and also of his deep love for the Rani. Had she not been a genuine spiritual aspirant, he probably would not have paid the slightest heed to her wandering mind. But she was a real devotee of the Divine Mother's and as such had to be forced to live up to her best intentions. She accepted the slap as a true disciple accepts the strict discipline of a true teacher.

At another time Sri Ramakrishna scolded two of the Rani's daughters. One reason for recounting this incident is to illustrate the attention that the Master paid to women. The Master did not ignore women, but took careful pains on many occasions to instruct them in both spiritual and other matters. The incident with the *susni*, a kind of green, illustrates this. It seems that the third mistress, the Rani's youngest daughter, and Mathur's wife, took some of these greens from her sister's share of the estate. Sri Ramakrishna saw this occur, and he told the daughter from whose pond the greens had been taken. He was so serious that the young woman laughed and even more laughter followed when the third mistress came along and was betrayed as having taken the greens. The Master told them it was wrong to take from another person's property, but the young women thought that Sri Ramakrishna was being too serious.²⁸ From his point of view he wanted them to pay attention to honesty. From instruction like this we see what care he took for the character of these women.

In 1859 Sri Ramakrishna went home to Kamarpukur where he was married to Sri Sarada Devi. He remained a year and seven months and then returned to Dakshineswar

to find Rani Rasmani, who by this time was sixty-eight years old, ill. She had injured herself by a fall and her condition worsened when she contracted dysentery. The disease was very serious, and the Rani knew that she was going to die. So she tried to execute a deed for the endowment of the Kali temple, but one of her daughters, Padma, failed to sign it, leaving her in doubt about the financial security of the temple. Finally she signed it herself, and the deed stood up in court. As Rani Rasmani's end approached, many lamps were lighted. However, she ordered the lamps put out, saying, 'My Mother (the Mother of the universe) is come now; all quarters have become illumined by the effulgence of her holy person.' She made one further inquiry about the deed. She addressed the Mother and asked what would happen because Padma had not signed it. Then having already been brought to the Ganga, Rani Rasmani passed from this world.²⁹

So ended the wonderful association of Rani Rasmani and Sri Ramakrishna. This extraordinary woman overcame uncounted obstacles in both her private and public life. She started life in very difficult circumstances, rose to prominence as the wife of a distinguished landowner and business man. Then she circumvented the rules of caste to fulfill the divine command of the Mother of the universe, and thus provided the setting for Sri Ramakrishna and his great sadhana. Not content with wealth and worldly life, she pursued religious practices with ardour and supported Sri Ramakrishna in his truth-inspired worship of Kali. And Sri Ramakrishna came to be her teacher, to correct her, to inspire her, to scold her, to encourage her, and to love her as only he could.

Let us reflect on the deeper meanings of this relationship of the Rani and the Master. First, as a woman, Rani Rasmani was unusually capable, intelligent, courageous,

27. Ibid., pp. 419-20.

28. Ibid., pp. 460-1.

29. Ibid., p. 183.

and strong—qualities which the Master encouraged in women. It was because of these qualities that she was able to undertake the Divine Mother's command and bring it to successful completion. She was an outstanding woman of her times. Further, it is extremely significant that she was not only a woman, but of low caste. We see that Sri Ramakrishna really paid very great homage to the Rani by his acceptance of Dakshineswar for spiritual practice, which in turn, indicates that the raising of women

was central to his message. He confirmed this important fact by undertaking his sadhana at the temple built by Rani and by becoming her teacher. Rani Rasmani was, in fact, the first person he instructed that we know of. She had great reverence for Sri Ramakrishna, and she also had backbone, an ideal combination for the modern age. Without the Rani, who wielded the sword of the Mother of the Universe, would there have been the divine drama of Dakshineswar?

(To be continued)

THE IMMORTAL INDIA

BODHISATTVA

(A Two-act Play based on Swami Vivekananda's reference in his lectures to the story of the Greek emperor Alexander and the Indian Yogi).

Characters: Alexander, the Greek Emperor aged about 30.

Selukas, the General of the Emperor Chieftain

Baul: A musician belonging to a Vaishnava sect.

Priest

1st Soldier

2nd Soldier

The Yogi

Act I

Scene: (King's court with a background of war tents beside a hill and a river, a silent wooded area. Alexander and Selukas are seen on the stage).

Alexander: Selukas, how wonderful is the land India! Mighty streams are flowing down the valleys. The infinite ocean is surging at its feet. The great Himalayas with its eternal, snow-capped peaks stands immovable in a sublime gesture. Flowers are blossoming throughout the seasons. Birds are singing through the year out. Stars are

twinkling bright as silver, bright as gold in the blue heavens of this tropical land. Selukas, have we ever seen the like of it in our journey of thousands of miles? We have conquered Kingdoms, killed millions, held thousands of captives. But did we ever feel happy so deeply as now?

(Alexander looks around)

Selukas, the land is really charming. It has a magic! It is wonderful!

Selukas: Your Majesty, it is all very true. On our way we have never come across such a land. Iran and Iraq was too hot. Mesopotamea was burning like midday sun. Samarkand is all stones and cactuses, no water, no shade, a land where camel caravans cross the sea of sands.

Alexander: Exactly, Selukas. They were seas of dry sands, deserts and stones, and here it is sea of flowers, mountains and green corns. India is the land of life, of birds, clouds, rains and fruits.

Selukas: Yes, my Lord, but have you noticed one more important thing of this land which is more charming than its nature?

Alexander: What is that?

Selukas: Its people! Its men and women!

Alexander: Men and women? What do you mean Selukas? Are they cannibals like the savages?

Selukas: Oh, no, my Lord. They are just the opposite. Have you not seen King Puru and the impressive nobility of his bearing? Though defeated, he stood undefeated in dignity and self-respect. Was that not marvellous?

Alexander: Yes, Oh Yes! I have never seen such a King as Puru. I am glad to have fought with Him. The King of the smallest Indian State offered the greatest resistance to this mighty emperor, Alexander. It is incredible! In this most beautiful land we had to fight the toughest war.

Selukas: But, my Lord, I have noticed a greater beauty of this land. Your Majesty can see only the battlefield. But I have seen the peasants' huts, the cottage of the labourers, and the hermitage of the Yogis.

Alexander: Yogis? Hermitage? (*Alexander expresses a contemptible curiosity*) What do they mean, Selukas? We are Greeks, the best and the bravest of the world. We have never heard such queer words. Have they got any meaning?

Selukas: (With all solemnity of faith and conviction) Yes, my Lord, they mean strange things. I have heard of the Yogis. They are uncommon men. They live in deep forest. They eat if anything is offered to them, otherwise they fast. They live the simplest life. They keep no money. They have no house, no family, no recreation. They live, I have heard, alone with God.

Alexander: (*Aside to himself, addressing softly the audience*) They are Yogis! They have no house and no family. They live alone, alone with God!

(*Suddenly turning to Selukas*)

It is impossible, Selukas. I won't believe. It is impossible. It is only mad man who lives alone, and they live alone not with gods but devils. Can you show me one?

I will take him home as my captive—captive to be my bondman, my slave. Selukas, forget not that you are a Greek. How could you get befooled by these impostors? Nonsense! A war-general believing in Yogis! How can you believe in such nonsense, such trash lies? You have won big battles but today you are fascinated by some queer half-clad men who are mad. And you call them Yogis! Strange!

(*Aside softly*) The spell of this strange land is already upon him.

(*Strongly*) Selukas, have you forgotten that you are a Greek, a hero? Remember, You are with Alexander, the conquerer. Is it not strange that you are fascinated by someone other than this great conqueror of the world?

Selukas: (*Kneeling at his feet*) My Lord, your Honour shall forgive me if I am ever disloyal to the Greatest Emperor of this world, under whose feet the whole of Asia lies like a bond slave. But distrust me not. I trust the Indians, their essential goodness and above all their simple godly way of life.

(*Drums and war-music outside. The Chieftain enters in with usual salutation etc. followed by two Indian captives tied in hand, one a Priest, another a musician with a single-stringed instrument*)

Chieftain: Your Majesty, as desired by you, I have brought these two captives—one a priest and the other a musician—to be taken to Greece.

(The captives are brought forward—the musician with long hairs and dressed like Bauls and with the instrument in his hand & the priest in a white Brahminical dress, long sacred thread, spots of sandal paste drawn over the forehead, very dignified and decent, rather charming in appearance with a book of hymns in his hand. The Baul and the Priest come forward in slow steady steps towards the King led by the Chieftain.)

Chieftain: Your Majesty, this priest was praying to a stone beneath a tree.

Alexander: Praying to a stone? (*Looking rather surprisingly with an amusing*

smile at Selukas).

Chieftain: Yes, Your Majesty.

Alexander: (To the Priest sarcastically) What were you praying for to the stone?

Priest: (With all the dignity and conviction of faith he speaks steadily, slowly).

Your Majesty, we do not pray to any stone. We pray to the Lord of the Universe. The stone is but a symbol. It is the One Lord who resides in everything, in the air, in the sky, in the trees, the birds, the animals, the blade of grass, and above all in man. It is only the unwise who thinks we worship a stone. The wise worship the One God through everything in this universe, and I choose to worship Him through a stone. Look at the musician. He too sings the glory of the one Lord of the Universe and every place is his place of prayer.

Selukas: Your Majesty, my Lord, this is what impressed me most in India, in this land. Last night our soldiers caught this queer singer. The whole night he sang in praise of his Lord inside the prison and the soldiers listened to him spellbound.

Alexander: (Deeply thoughtful) Selukas, it seems incredible, unbelievable that my heroes, the soldiers listened to this crazy, boozy fools all night. Get them away from me. (They slowly leave the stage). (To Selukas) Have the soldiers turned mad?

(Suddenly from the background is heard the song of the musician. All listen.)

Selukas: Mad, your Majesty? Yes, indeed they are. For the musician sings even now with all the ecstasy of a divine madness.

Alexander: (To himself) I too seem to be impressed with what Selukas is saying. Who knows how many more wonders are there for me to see in this land?

(To Selukas) Selukas, it seems there is truth in what you are saying. Indians are uncommon. Uncommon are their lives and ways. They love gods and we love war. You were telling about Yogis. Yes, I will

be glad to see one. Send our soldiers to bring one such Yogi here. The earlier the better.

,Alexander and Selukas leave the stage. The light slowly goes out. The soft tune of the musician's song is heard in the background.)

[End of Act 1]

Act II

(Scene: Inside a forest, a hut made of dry leaves with beautiful creepers hanging from its roof. A river in the distant background and a hill under a vast expanse of sky. There is none on the stage. Only from the background is heard a Sanskrit chanting with resonant intonations, sometimes only intervened by the sweet chirping of forest birds. An atmosphere of calm serenity and sublimity pervades. Two soldiers suddenly enter with swords drawn out in their hands. They seem to be exhausted and drunk.)

1st Soldier: (Excited) Where is that creature? Where is that mad man who is called a Yogi? Queer! Strange Mad heathens! And our emperor is mad to see him. I doubt his majesty is under the spell of this magic land!

2nd Soldier: But, dear brother, do not forget the King's command. We must seek him out and take the queer creature unto the King or he will put us into hell.

1st Soldier: Hell? Hell we are already in. This forest, full of bushes, snakes, tigers, insects, rains and storm. Is not this a hell?

(Sanskrit chanting is heard louder in deep solemn voice in the background. The soldiers are struck by the music. They feel a change).

2nd Soldier: (In a hushed voice) Look, look there someone comes. He looks like the yogi.

1st Soldier: Let us get ready. Where are the chains? (They collect the chains).

(The Soldiers stand in silent, eager expectation as if ready to catch a missing captive. The Yogi

enters the stage in slow steps. He has the face of a Buddha, extremely beautiful, no sign of fear or hesitation, a pair of indrawn eyes, a lock of hair on the head like Shiva, the body smeared with white ashes. He is clad in tiger skin. His legs are beautifully white and contrasted against the darker skin of the tiger.)

Yogi: (With a majestic unruffled, calm voice) Who are you ?

The Soldiers: (Struck as if by a sudden sense of awe and respect) Soldiers of our Emperor, Holy Sir!

Yogi: (Innocently surprised like a child) Emperor ? Who is your emperor ? There is only one Emperor. He is the King of this whole universe. (Stretches his hands out to show the vastness).

Soldiers: (Rather apologetically) We are the soldiers of the Greek Emperor, Alexander, and he has asked us to bring you to his court.

Yogi: Alexander ? What shall I do with him ?

1st Soldier: His majesty desires you to come to his tent.

2nd Soldier: The King wants you to be near him.

Yogi: I am, I was and I shall always be near my Lord, the Emperor of the Universe. He is nearer than the nearest. What need is there for me to go to your king ? I do not need anything. My Lord sends me everything I require. There are plenty of fruits in the forest. The birds and beasts are my friends. They are my own. (Chirping of birds in the background).

1st Soldier: He seems to love even these dreadful animals. Wonderful!

Yogi: Hark! All through the seasons these birds sing the glories of the Lord, the Emperor of the universe. He who is guiding the stars in their heavenly orbits, He who is blossoming flowers on trees, He who is sending light through sun, and food through rains—He is looking after me. He is my emperor! Who else can there be ? He guides me in life and He will guide me through

death. He is eternal. He is omnipresent, He is present in you, just as He is present in me. He is the Emperor. Who else can be so great as He ? Man is mortal. Man is a slave to death. How can he be the emperor ? Go back to your king. Tell him I do not need any one, any human being, king or courtier. If he needs me, he may come.

(The monk leaves the stage as slowly as he came. The two soldiers speak among themselves.)

1st Soldier: He speaks strange things. Let us return and tell our Majesty that we found the Yogi and report the strange words he spoke to us.

2nd Soldier: (Sarcastically) But, his majesty will never tolerate such words. Our great emperor is not going to be impressed by such ramblings, ramblings only fit for madman. I am afraid, if he listens to us he would not only kill the queer Yogi, but also us.

(A sound of marching is heard at a distance. The two soldiers look on all sides and suddenly realize that their king Alexander himself is coming towards them.)

1st Soldier: Look, look there comes our king.

2nd Soldier: Let us be ready. Where is the Yogi gone ? Has he fled ? Ah! The troublesome queer, crazy fellow. Quick, let us first find him out.

(Alexander enters the stage with a deeply thoughtful face led by Selukas).

Selukas: In this magic land I always feel a sense of wonder. The strength of the ascetics who inhabit this place impresses me all the more. Do not you feel, your majesty, any charm ?

Alexander: Selukas! forget not. Alexander is a Greek. An emperor who has conquered dozens of nations, killed millions of men and women, and has flooded with blood many battlefields, cannot be impressed by men in rags!

Selukas: But, my Lord, the power of the Spirit, the strength of faith is much more stronger than all weapons of the world combined.

(Sound of foot steps. Alexander looks around and finds the soldiers.)

Alexander: (To the Soldiers) What were you doing so long? Boozy fools! Did you find the Yogi out?

Soldiers: Yes, your honour, we saw one just a few minutes before. He went inside the forest. We hope he will come here soon. This is his hut. (They point out to a hut).

Alexander: Is this his hermitage? Aha! A real palace indeed! Where is he gone? (To *Selukas*) I doubt if he is a human being at all! He must be a heathen savage.

(Chanting is heard in the background. Everybody gets alerted.)

Selukas: There he comes, your majesty.

(The Monk enters again with that slow, meditative, and stately movement, still humming the chanting in rhythmic Sanskrit. All stand with a kind of awe and silence as the monk enters.)

Yogi: (Calmly) I see two new faces. Who are you, my brothers?

Selukas: Here is emperor Alexander of Greece. He has come to meet you.

Yogi: Emperor? I know only one Emperor who is the Father of the infinite universe. He sees through infinite eyes. He hears through infinite ears. He speaks through infinite lips. He is the Eternal Witness of all. He is here, there, everywhere. Where will He come, where will He go? It is all He. (Turning to Alexander with a sweet smile) Are you the emperor who wants to see me?

Alexander: The king of Greece needs no introduction.

Yogi: Yes, I can see from your forehead that you have conquered some nations by killing millions.

Alexander: Yes, Sir, the entire world between Greece and India has been conquered by me. And I rule supreme in this great world.

Yogi: You rule supreme? You have conquered? What have you conquered? Only some stones and sands? Some skulls and bones? What is there in these things? Have you conquered your anger, your desires, your pride? Have you conquered the fear of death which is hanging on you just as it hanged on the millions who were put to death by you?

Selukas: (Aside) He speaks great truth.

Yogi: (Prophetically) I read from your face that you have acquired enormous wealth by plundering countries, killed men and women just to satisfy your insatiable desire. Why not stop now at least? Why not distribute the wealth for the needy, the poor, and the distressed? All wealth belongs to God only. So give them to His children, the poor, the living gods.

Alexander: (Changed face, with reverence and respect, yet with pride) I will. But I want you to come with me to my country, Greece. I will give enormous wealth, palace, money, power, men, soldiers.—everything that you want. You must come with me, Sir. You will have, I assure, anything and everything you want.

Yogi: (Smiling with a calm sweetness) I want nothing. My Lord sends me everything. He sends me food through the trees. He sends me light through the sun. He sends peace and joy unlimited in my heart. The birds sing to me. The seasons offer me flowers for my worship. I live alone, but alone with God. I never feel lonely, I live with the greatest emperor of whose Kingdom there is no end.

Alexander: (Stiffly) But I, Alexander the Great, am insisting you and ordering you to come with me.

Yogi: I listen to none's orders, except the voice of God in my heart.

Selukas: (Pleading) Holy Sir, please come

with us, or you might suffer. These soldiers may bind you as captive and take you by force.

Yogi: Suffer? It is only the flesh that suffers. The spirit is above all pleasure and pain. I won't move leaving my friends—the birds, the animals, the trees and the forest. They love me more than you. You destroy nations, they give life. You are killers. They are life-givers.

Alexander: Selukas, this Yogi is impertinent. He does not know whom he is talking to. *(To the Yogi)* Do you hear?

Yogi: Men are mortals, puny creatures. What can they do to me? What is the use of listening to your words ignoring the voice of the Almighty God in my heart?

Alexander: *(Suddenly raged)* Shut up! *(Draws out his flashing sword from the scabbard)* Come with me, or I will kill you at this very moment!

Yogi: *(Looks at the sword for a while like a child, and then suddenly bursts out into a roaring laughter that echoes inside the hall. He looks again at Alexander and continues his laughter)* Ha, haa, Ha! *(To Alexander, as if talking to a child)*

You have never told a greater lie than this. How can you kill *me*? You can only cut the flesh which is only a garment for the undying, immortal, divine self which neither weapons can kill, nor the fire can burn, nor the water can wet, nor the wind can dry up. You are Emperor? Who made you so? God. You boast of your power. Who gave you that? God. You will kill

me! Ha, ha, ha *(Suddenly with a grave seriousness and a sensitive, loving gesture)* Emperor! What for all these wealth? What for all these nations, all these victories? Why do you want to take me home? You do not know what you are talking about. *(Prophetically)* I read on your face something strange! I see it very clearly, just as day light. A dark future is coming down like a curtain on you.

Selukas: Holy Sir, what is that? What do you mean?

Yogi: *(Prophetically, as if to himself)* I see distinctly that Alexander will never see Greece again. He will see the last sunrise on his way home.

(A dead silence falls on the stage. Alexander looks sad in silence. The yogi leaves the stage as slowly as he entered.)

Selukas: The day is gone, my Lord! The sun is setting on the western-hills. Let us hasten to return.

Alexander: *(Still under the spell of the Yogi, calm, gravely thoughtful, slowly looks up at the audience. The lights slowly go off the stage. Evening approaches in the background. Alexander speaks as if in a dream.)*

The day is dying. Long is the path and hard is the journey to my beloved Greece. Yes, the sun will now set on the western horizon. *(Dreamily)* Selukas, when shall I go back to my home?

(The screen slowly comes down.)

(End of Act II)

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

An Indian artist with a spiritual vision

In 1984 United Nations publications division brought out a small volume in Japan depicting the story of Sri Krishna through a short life-sketch and fourteen full-page paintings in the traditions of Indian folk art. The book was published by Unesco for Japanese children and the language was Japanese. The paintings were originally exhibited in Japan in an UNESCO exhibition on Asian Culture and studies. The school children of Japan liked these sketches in simple, fluid linings which speak more of the unspeakable charm of Sri Krishna than many books. The Zenza-El school in Nagasaki, donated a whole day's contribution of stamps, 50 letters, photos, children's own paintings as a mark of appreciation to the Indian artist who wrote the life-sketch and made these coloured paintings.

The artist Ramananda Bandopadhyaya, was born on 12 May 1936. His father, a disciple of Swami Abhedananda, was a devout Ramakrishnite. Through him and others, Sri Bandopadhyaya soon came under the influence of the illustrious Nandalal Bose and learnt Indian art under his guidance at Santiniketan. Subsequently Sri Bandopadhyaya expressed his genius in Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Purulia, where he worked as an art-teacher and where his unforgettable paintings still decorate the walls and buildings of the prestigious institution. At present he is in-charge of the department of Art and Paintings in the well-known Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, where nearly 200 young artists come to learn from him.

Until now he has produced over 5,000 sketches and paintings, some of which like *Tumbi* or *Purulia's Chou*, have been exhibited in countries like West Germany and America. He considers his paintings on Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna published on the cover of *Desh*, a widely-circulated

Bengali weekly, the best to date. Ramakrishna fascinates him, because he is so ancient and yet so modern. Ramakrishna was himself a divine artist, whose sketches strike him as great because they are 'perfect'. Why does he go back to Ramakrishna-theme in his paintings again and again? Because they make an artist a better artist. While working on this theme he feels a definite mental elevation and an urge to have the vision of Ramakrishna.

In 1961 while absorbed in paintings on Vivekananda for children, he had a mystic vision in which he clearly saw the prophet sitting by a roadside under a thatched hut and asking him in love, 'Hello boy! How are you?' The vision became a turning point in his life.

Brought up in a remote village of Bengal in the midst of traditional rituals and ceremonies, Sri Bandopadhyaya has developed since childhood an inborn love for folk-art whose simplicity, according to him, is inexplicable and deep. Today his dream is to bring out a book on Sri Ramakrishna with sketches based on the parables, similes, symbols, flowers, animals, trees, and the different aspects of nature mentioned in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. He hopes to evolve a new art form in the style of Ajanta, combined with the mystical depth and excellence of the folk-art of Bengal. Indian paintings must be rooted deep in India's culture, says the artist. Then only a successful modernity can be expected. In fact this new modernity, a combination of the old and the new, is the dominant style in his art today.

A calm and poised man, Sri Bandopadhyaya with his usual smile of humility says: 'Only the truly powerful can become humble!' His dream is to reach the state of desirelessness through art which has already become, for him, a spiritual passion and path for attaining inner perfection.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

HYMNS FROM THE GOLDEN AGE: BY DAVID FRAWLEY. Published by Motilal Banarsidass, 41 U.A. Bungalow Road, Jawaharnagar, Delhi 110 007. 1986. Pp. 256. Rs. 125.

It is usually agreed that the modern age is predominantly materialistic and has reached a point when we have started realizing that this

ideology cannot be furthered in the interest of human life and culture. The imbalance between the mind and matter has created a situation where spirituality has been reduced to a negligible position. This has resulted in constant threat to our existence on this planet. The nuclear programmes endanger not only human life, but life as such on

the earth. The Star-war propositions make the issue further complicated.

Amidst such threats to human spirit it is natural for a conscientious soul to be drawn towards the spiritual wealth of the Vedic literature. David Frawley of the Vedic Research Centre in Santa Fe, N.M.(U.S.A.) has made a formidable attempt to read out the spiritual message of the Rig Veda for the modern man. As we know, the *Mantra* (or *Samhita*) portion of the *Rig Veda* is supposed to be the earliest record of human language and literature. Hence, the thirst for divinity and spirituality of man today could be quenched by the eternal and primeval spring of this supernatural composition.

The book entitled *Hymns from the Golden Age* is English translation (with Yogic interpretation) of selected hymns of the *Rig Veda Samhita*. It is an important contribution to Vedic hermeneutics in the sense that it tries to understand the Vedic *mantras* in their true sense, which, according to the author, lies beyond dictionary meaning. Usually the translators apply dictionary meanings in translating any text. But this practice causes irreparable loss to the proper understanding of the meaning of the text, especially if it belongs to earlier centuries and to other cultures. For instance, the word '*vrik*' means 'wolf' in the dictionaries. But the etymological meaning of this word is 'that which tears'. As such it could be used for anything that tears, may that be a plow or an evil force (including gods, as destroyers of such evil forces). But symbolically it is used for a wolf. Similarly other terms, like cow, have been used in the Vedas and their specific meanings are likely to be missed if we take the dictionary meaning.

It may be noted in the context that the ancients did not use words for substantive nouns. The nouns were used in general adjectival manner that could be related to other nouns. Thus the word '*vrik*' may mean a wolf, but never only a wolf. And when we translate from one kind of language to another very different, and fix particular words in translations, difficulties arise. It may also be noted in this context that the ancients preferred the animal symbols to others as they reflected the primeval and unknown character of the Being.

The translator has tried to go to the root meaning of the key-terms in both abstract and concrete senses for an integral comprehension of those terms. This method leads him to reach the more inner and abstract meaning of the *mantras*. The effort is added with the mystical background of the translator. In order to clarify the meaning

of the *mantras* he prefaces each part and section of the translation with background information and provides interpretatory passages after each *mantra* or a group of *mantras*. This helps the reader understand the meaning of the text in a much better way.

The work is divided into three parts. The first part, entitled *Prelude*, includes hymns to Heaven and Earth and hymns to the Dawn. The second part introduces the four-fold Godheads, namely, the fire, Indra, the sun and Soma. The Fire-god is depicted as 'divine flame of awareness in the heart'; Indra as the spiritual man; the Sun as solar self of divine intelligence, and Soma as the mystic wine—the bliss of pure Perception.

The author holds that the *Rig Veda* represents the original cultural roots of mankind and is as much the original scripture of the West as the Bible that came much later. Hence it is obligatory on the part of the West to look back at this heritage seriously. The author wishes to bring the Aryan seer out in the people of the West by this and such other works. It will, for him, stimulate true nobility of character and capacity to perceive the truth.

The prime value of the Aryan society, according to the author, is 'worship of the divine,' inwardly for the wise (and outwardly for not-so-wise). For the Aryans entire creation is the manifestation of the Divine Word. The goal of the mantric language is to reveal the great truth of oneness of Being. Many gods are the principles of comprehending multiplicity in unity and unity in creative universality. The organic unity (harmony) of the dualistic or pluralistic principles is frequently emphasized in the *mantras* of the *Rig Veda*. The *mantras* invoke/evoke the unity of existence not by overt philosophical propositions but by the natural coalescence of meanings into the Divine. To understand the spiritual roots of human civilization we must know the true meaning of the *mantras*. Thus we can touch the mystery of that spirituality from which we have not so much advanced as fallen. The realization of this spirituality can again lead us to the actualization of the Golden Age (*Satya-Yuga*) even in the *Kali-yuga*.

The work is an exceptionally admirable attempt to understand the Vedic vision. After Sri Aurobindo it is, perhaps, the most original hermeneutical exercise in Vedic studies.

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VIVEKANANDA'S CONCEPT OF HISTORY:

BY SWAMI SOMESWARANANDA Published by Samata Prokasani, 35/7B, Ratan Babu Road, Calcutta, 700 002. 1986. Pp. xv + 115. Rs. 30.

The book is a distinct contribution to the analysis of thinking of one of the greatest minds that India has ever produced. Swami Vivekananda's life was not given merely to speculative thinking. In a short span of thirty nine years he spoke so much, wrote so profoundly and worked so intensely towards the well-being of the world that he must remain a wonder even for geniuses, let alone ordinary mortals. This truly rational hero of India made history himself. It is therefore in the fitness of things that an analysis of his concept of history is made in the book under review.

History, literally a study or enquiry of the past, has been conceptualised by eminent writers from different philosophic perspective. Hegel looked upon history as the movement of the world spirit through the dialectical process of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. Toynbee, the doyen of modern historians, saw in history the vision of god. To Karl Marx history was nothing but class struggle. Swami Vivekananda's concept of history was refreshingly original and unique in this that he envisioned history as the struggle of the human soul throughout ages for its maximum manifestation. In a letter to Sister Nivedita he wrote that the history of civilization is the progressive reading of spirit into matter. This implied the struggle of the consciousness against the inert and its gradual ascendancy over the latter. If civilization implied the ascendancy of the spirit over the matter, the progress meant to Swamiji controlling nature both external and internal. As a matter of fact, it was far more important to control the internal nature, that is, the mind which is weighed down by a hundred hankerings and this could be done with the help of religion and moral standards. Swamiji considered religion so important for India that he wrote that the national genius of India lay in her religiousness or religiosity. To quote Swamiji, "The life of this nation is religion, its language religion, and its idea religion, and your politics, society, municipality, plague prevention work, and famine relief work—all these things will be done as they have been done all along here, viz. only through religion" (C.W. 5: 461).

In addition to highlighting the conquest of nature, especially the internal one, Swamiji's *theory of the progress of history* emphasizes the *decentralization* of the four fundamental social forces, namely, knowledge, arms-power, money

and physical labour. Society suffers whenever these social forces are centralized in the hands of a particular group or class. Society expands or develops when these fundamental forces are decentralized among the masses, enabling the common mass to utilize these for their development towards total freedom—freedom in the physical, intellectual and spiritual spheres.

History is not an abstract concept to Swami Vivekananda. He relates the four fundamental social forces to four classes—Brahmins (priests and intellectuals), kshatriyas (kings, generals, and administrators), Vaishyas (businessmen), and Shudras (farmers, labourers)—existing in all societies throughout the ages. Every country is bound to be ruled by one or the other of these social groups or classes. Swamiji's *theory of class rule* holds good for the present states of the world. "At present we have a Brahminical rule in the middle-east States (the social forces being centralized and controlled by religious leaders), a Kshatriya rule in the Latin American States (the states being ruled by military dictators); a Vaishya rule in Europe and the USA, and finally a Sudra rule in China and USSR" (p. 16). Each type of class rule has its merits and demerits. One class rule gives way to the other when it becomes much too centralizing and monopolizing of selfish privileges at the cost of others. The pains that the author has taken in proving the applicability of Swamiji's theory of class rule to states in the modern world and the appropriate examples and statistics that he has compiled in this connection deserve high praise.

The final chapter of the book compares the revolutionary outlooks of Swami Vivekananda and Karl Marx, and establishes the greater depth and profundity of Swamiji as a revolutionary thinker in making the point that without the comprehensive cultural revolution of the type conceived by Swami Vivekananda, the class revolution of the type propagated by Karl Marx cannot go very far. In the words of the author, "Marx stressed more on politico-economic revolution whereas Swamiji stressed on social revolution along with cultural revolution. History proved Swamiji's view as a better one". (p. 94). This assertion may not be liked by those who rigidly believe otherwise, but that does not make the author's arguments in favour of his point any less weighty. To appreciate how deep was Swamiji's understanding of the forces of historical change, one has to take note of his prophecy regarding the first advent of communism in the world—"take it from me—the

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PRACTICAL HINTS ON SPIRITUAL LIFE

Discrimination and Desirelessness

1. Always discriminate between the Real and the unreal. To keep the power of discrimination awake in the mind is the greatest spiritual exercise.... He who has learned to discriminate can successfully overcome lust and craving.... Then alone will the heart be purified, and then alone will God be revealed. —*Swami Adbhutananda*

2. If a man has wealth and has not discrimination, he will not know how to spend his money intelligently and it may only make him miserable. If a man has learning and lacks discrimination, he will not know how to use his knowledge wisely. But if a man has the discriminative faculty and nothing else, he is still the most fortunate of men, because through it he may attain the loftiest ends. —*Swami Ramakrishnananda*

3. The common man takes to those activities which tend to perpetuate the bond of attachment. And this is true of the whole world. The only exceptions are the sadhus, who have found out the evanescence of the world and renounced it. Knowledge dawns when discrimination is perfect. —*Swami Turiyananda*

4. Along with meditation and repetition of the Lord's name, we must reason keenly and carefully—we must search out the desires hiding in the dark corners of the mind and drive them away.... Thus we are to conquer the mind.... Simply meditating or repeating God's names, without any effort at rooting out the desires, will not do. —*Swami Premananda*

5. Q: How may I check a distracting thought that persistently arises in my mind?

A: Think to yourself: "This thought is immensely harmful to me. It will be my ruin!". Impress the idea again and again on your mind. The mind is extremely susceptible to suggestions, and will learn whatever you teach it. Therefore, if through discrimination you can impress upon it the joy and fullness of the spiritual life and the folly of worldly attachments; it will devote itself more and more to God, and you will find yourself freed from all distracting thoughts. —*Swami Brahmananda*

6. Always discriminate. Try to realize that the outside object which is attracting your mind is impermanent, and turn your attention to God. —*Holy Mother*

7. Desirelessness and the vision of God are like the opposite sides of the same leaf. —*Swami Premananda*

8.desire alone is the root of all suffering. It is the cause of repeated births and deaths. It is the obstacle in the way of liberation. —*Holy Mother*

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rising of Sudras will first take place in Russia and then in China". He made this prophecy as far back as 1898 and this becomes all the more significant in the context of the failure of Marxian prediction of the first rise of communism in the advanced Western capitalist countries.

In compiling Swami Vivekananda's observations on history scattered through the eight volumes of his works, in integrating them, and in incorporating historical and contemporary evidences in support of Swamiji's views, the author, Swami Someswarananda, has accomplished a remarkable

job. The special strength of his book lies in testing the relevance of Swami Vivekananda's ideas in the elucidation of modern problems. The comparative frame of the book throwing light as well on the ideas of other historians like Marx, Toynbee, Thucydides, Khuldon, Weber, Herder, Smith and Durant has added to its strength. This is a valuable work indeed deserving the adoration of one and all.

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‘He who knows the Supreme attains the highest.’—Tait. Upa II.1.1

Vol. II No. 9

MADRAS, MARCH 1898

Published Monthly

[*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa*. Mr. M. who is a devoted grihastha disciple of the great Master, is piously anxious that the Gospel should spread far and wide and that its influence should reach every corner of the land. Space forbade us from publishing the ‘leaves’ which he favoured us with, on former occasions, our journal being a monthly one and comparatively small. But those which appear in this issue are of absorbing interest and require a very vast circulation. Besides they specially suit our journal as presenting the loftiest ideas in the simplest language, as we have been attempting to do. For these reasons we need make no apology to our readers for publishing them here at the cost of other articles. And we most heartily thank Mr. M. for the kindness with which he favoured us with them and pray God that his holy work may meet with the appreciation and reward which it so richly deserves. The translation was done by him immediately after *Sravanam* from the notes taken down then and there and is therefore perfectly reliable.]

And the Master sang, looking up with fixed steadfast eyes all the while :—

Identity of the Personal God and the Impersonal God: Difficulty of Jnana-yoga

1. O, my Mind! what line art thou taking to realize that Being? Thou art groping about like a mad man in a dark room.

2. With a view to that *bhava* (Love) the great *yogi* practises one *yuga* (decade) after another *yoga* (meditation) for the re-union with the Universal soul.

Once this *bhava* (Love) springs up in his (*yogi's*) heart, he draws the Supreme Being near unto him, much as the Loadstone draws the iron.

5. “Says *Prasad* ‘The Being whom I call my Mother and try thus to realize, shall I let out Her real Name*?’

Would not that be breaking (my sacred) cooking pot in the Court-yard of the house (before the eyes of the unfeeling multitude)? Guess, O my mind, who that Being is, by the hints I have thrown out, with my off-eye.”

There was deep silence at the end of this song, which was listened to with rapt attention. Every one was moved. The master remained for a long while with his mind fixed upon the Hallowed Feet of the Divine Mother, the Great Burden of this soul-stirring Psalm.

**Brahma* of the Vedanta both Saguna and Nirguna (Personal and Impersonal).